

Don't hate the player, hate the game!

18 SNL

—THE— PLAYERS GUIDE

NOLWAZI MBULI

THE PLAYERS GUIDE

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Work hard and play harder. That's a mantra I live by every single day of my life. Why shouldn't I? I am twenty seven years old, no kids, no man, no cat, no dog, no black tax, basically I'm happy.

My work keeps me busy. Being an IT specialist isn't as easy as people think. Especially those who think IT means being a hacker and all the stuff sold in movies. My job is demanding. And the fact that I have so many clients all over the country who trust me to keep their businesses safe means I'm too busy, so having to deal with a man is not my portion Chile. I just can't deal with all the drama which is why I decided I'll see relationships when I turn thirty or maybe thirty five, I'm not sure yet.

I have a meeting with a potential client. An international one. If I can bag this one it will open a whole new environment for me. I might even be able to open the international branch I've been dreaming of. I drove into Sandton city and went straight to the San Deck restaurant. I found Adebowale Joshua already waiting for me. I took a deep breath and walked towards him. This man, right at this moment holds all the power to me expanding my business into the rest of Africa.

"Mr Joshua." I said soon as I got to him. He stood up and shook my hand before opening the chair for me to sit.

"Miss Majola, it's a pleasure to finally meet you." He takes a seat and calls the waiter over.

"The pleasure is all mine. I must say I was surprised to get your call." The waiter comes over, takes my order and leaves.

"I've heard a lot about you Miss Majola, I've spoken to a few of your clients and each of them speaks

highly of you and your work." I'm not sure if I should be flattered or not. I've never heard anyone say they went behind my back and dug up info about me. I wonder what else he dug up. "I want you to work for me." Okay, I need to breath. This could be it, but I need to keep my cool.

"Okay, what is it that you need from me specifically?" He takes a sip of his juice and looks at me. His dark brown eyes are captivating, his dark chocolate skin glows everytime the sun hits. Now I understand why Beyonce had to sing an ode to the brown skin.

"I have a position for you in my company, as head of IT." This must be Trevor Noah in disguise. How am I supposed to quit running a business to go work for someone else. Make it make sense.

"Mr Joshua....."

"Call me Wale, all my friends do." He said with a huge smile on his face.

"Mr Joshua, I do believe when you asked around about me you were told I am a businesswoman, I run

my own business."

"I know. And I also know it would take a lot to take you from your business. So here's my offer." He took out a piece of paper from his blazer pocket and put it on the table then shoved it to me. I opened it and any other day i would be impressed by the number on it. But this is something I make a week with my current clients, with more clients that I'm working to secure this will be change. "That's a generous offer Miss Majola. Think about it." Well I have nothing to think about.

"It is a great offer, unfortunately I can't take it."

"Of course you can."

"Okay let me rephrase. I wont take your offer Mr Joshua. This, in my opinion is an insult to the work I've put into my business and cementing myself in the IT industry. So thank you, but no thanks." I just wasted twenty minutes of my life that I'll never get back.

"Think carefully about this Miss Majola. You dont

want to make an enemy of me." So refusing a job offer is going to turn him into an enemy? I swear the devil is testing me.

"Have a good day Mr Joshua." I grabbed my bag and walked out. I took out my phone and called my PA.

"Miss Majola." She answered. Knowing her she's probably still at the office. The perks of having dedicated employees.

"Are you at the office?" She chuckles and I know that's a yes. "Go home Pinky."

"I'm on my way."

"Good. Tell me about this Adebowale Joshua I was meeting?"

"You didn't read the file I gave you right?"

"Pinky man." She laughs.

"Okay, he owns Joshua Industries in Nigeria, well his father does. He heads up the IT side of things. Why? Does he want you guys to collab?"

"No, he wants me to work for him."

"Is he crazy?"

"He thinks this is a joke. Anyways I'll read his file. Now go home." She laughs and I hang up.

I decided to go past Nandos to get something to eat later, I was in no mood to cook. I got there and looked at the menu but nothing caught my eyes. I looked at the time, it wasn't too late, I'm sure I can still get some mogodu KwaMaiMai. I left and went to the parking lot and got into my car. I drove to KwaMaiMai, despite of the traffic I made it there in less than forty five minutes. I took my heels off and put on my sneakers that were lying on the floor in the backseat. I took out a hundred rand note from my bag and got out of the car.

I walked over to my favourite stall and lucky for me, MaSibisi was still there. Her little table in front of her stall was occupied by a few guys. I greeted them and proceeded to MaSibisi.

"Sawbona ma. (Hello.)" She turned and looked at me with her warm welcoming smile.

"Tivikele, how are you nana."

"I'm good ma, please tell me you still have ulusu? Pretty please." She laughed and came closer.

"Unfortunately its finished. The only one left are takeaways that people ordered." My heart broke in a million pieces.

"Kodwa ma. I drove here just for ulusu Iwakho. Please have mercy on me." She laughed and took out a Tupperware container from her little cabinet and hands it to me.

"This was supposed to be for my kids. I'm too lazy to cook tonight. But for you, I guess I can make a little sacrifice." She says with a huge smile on her face. My cheeks are seriously getting painful from the smiling I keep doing. I'm so happy right now. I take the hundred rand note and hand it to her.

"Ngyabonga ma."

I quickly walk back to my car. This mogodu smells divine. I open the container and take a piece of meat. It tastes divine too. All I need to do now is get home and cook pap and I'm good for the night. I drive out but now I feel bad for taking MaSibisi's Mogodu. I'm sure she's tired and just wanted to rest tonight. And now she'll have to get home and slave away on the stove. Shit. I see a McDonald's close by and I figure I might as well get her some takeaways. Lucky for me I know she has two kids, a son and a daughter and she also stays with her sisters two kids.

I park my car and get in. I buy four big mac's and drinks and I get back in the car. Now I need to find a KFC cause I know MaSibisi's traditional Zulu man will want meat. I buy a nine piece bucket and make my way out. I drive back to KwaMaiMai and get the takeaways out of the car. I walk to her stall just as she is about to close.

"Tivikele, ubuyile ntombi (you are back.)"

"Yebo ma. I felt bad for taking the kids food so I brought them something."

"Oh baby, you didnt have too."

"I had to. Can I take you home?"

"Dont worry, my husband is coming to get me."

"Okay then, usalekahle ma. (Stay well.)" I hand her the takeaways and head back to my car.

I drive back to Fourways and head to my apartment. I get my laptop bag and all my work files together with my mogodu and go in. I throw the bag and files on the couch and boil the kettle to cook pap. I rush to my room and undress. I take a quick shower and in ten minutes I'm out. I just saved gallons of water, I should be considered a climate change hero.

I put on some lounge wear and go back to the kitchen. I put the pot on the stove and cook my pap. While waiting for it to cook I sit on the couch and go through Adebawale's file. That man thinks he is slick.

Not only does he head Joshua Industries IT division but they are diversifying and looking to make the IT division a standalone entity. So he thinks if I join them he will automatically get my clients and his little IT division will go from zero to one hundred in five seconds. Mxm. Tomorrow I need to get in touch with all our clients and touch base just to know where we stand with them.

My pap is done. I warm ulusu and get ready to indulge. My phone rings as I take a seat to enjoy myself. I pick it up and I dont know this number, it could be important so I pick it up.

"Hello."

"It was nice seeing you today."

"Who is this?" Makhosi thinks he is clever. I wonder how he got my number.

"Your future husband." I cut the call and ate my food. He calls again and I ignore him. He calls two more

times and i ignore him. I guess he finally gave up cause I finished my food without being bothered.

MAKHOSI

I've never been more captivated by a woman in my entire life. Well except the girl who broke my heart at varsity and married her ex. It took me a long long time to get over that girl. Or maybe I never did get over her, I just learnt to live without her. I spent a better part of my life trying to get over her with no luck. In every woman I met I saw her. And I guess thats why I have no qualms with sleeping with a woman today and waking up the next day and forgetting she exists.

My life was perfect. I ran my dads dairy farm business by day and my club business by night that I co own with a friend. I had a pick of any girl I wanted and anytime I wanted, it was perfect. Until one night an average sized brown skin woman walked into my

club. She had on a short sparkly dress with small straps. Her perky D cup boobs were squashed into the dress but they moulded into the best looking cleavage. Her soft bronzed thighs and legs rested on a black pair of Giuseppe Zanotti heels. Her wavy curls bounced off her head so beautifully. I was captivated from the moment I laid eyes on her.

She made her way to the VIP section where two of her friends were. She greeted them and took a seat. I watched her throughout the night. Her smile everytime she showed it made me see heaven. She was beautiful. I knew right then and there I had to have her. Sometime before two AM she walked out of the club with her head held high and her dignity intact. If I didnt know better I'd say she was drinking water the whole time she was here. But I'd seen the bottles of wine and champagne being delivered to her table so I knew she was a bit tipsy.

I decided to follow her out to the parking lot to

introduce myself. She said her goodbyes to her friends then headed to her car. She was parked outside on the street since she got here late. I offered to walk her to her car and she obliged. We got to her car and she turned to look at me. Even under the street lights her hazel brown eyes shone bright like a diamond, a bit reddish diamond but a diamond nonetheless.

"Thank you for walking me." She said as she turned to look at me with her back on the car.

"My pleasure. How about a nightcap at my place?" She smiled. For a moment I thought she'd say no. Instead she handed me her car keys and went to the passenger side. I unlocked the door and she got in. I got in and drove us to my apartment. We got to my place and I poured her a glass of wine. I handed her the wine while she was looking at the artwork on the wall, on top of the fireplace. One of my other hobbies was painting, and this one piece of art was something I couldn't let go. It was a sketch of my ex, with her back to us and her ass on full display. Don't

ask me why i still have my ex's portrait on my wall.

"Impressive. Who is the muse?" She asked as she sipped on her wine. For the first time in my life I was afraid to tell her it was my ex. What if she judges me? I didnt understand why I was so afraid and excited all at the same time by this woman.

"Its a long story. Maybe one day I'll tell you all about this portrait." She smiled and turned around. She put her glass on top of the mantel piece, she took my glass and placed it next to hers. She pushed me down on to the chair next to the fireplace and straddled me.

"Now that we've got the chitchat out the way we can get down to the real reason why we are here. We both know you didnt invite me here for just wine." She said as she unbuttoned my shirt. This was another first for me. Having a woman take control, I wasnt used to it. I'm a proud Zulu man and I love being in control. But this time i gladly gave up my control to her. Best decision yet.

We got steamy and heavy in the lounge. A few orgasms later she was dozing off. I carried her upstairs to my bedroom and we had another steamy session before I let her sleep. I went to the bathroom and threw away the condoms and got a warm towel, I cleaned her up while she slept. I opened the safe in my walk in closet and took out the usual 10k I always give the girls I spend the night with. I placed it on her side of the bed, took a shower and drifted off to sleep.

I woke up the next morning and like a dream she was gone. There was no trace of her. Most girls I have to wake up and remind them to leave but not her, she was up and gone before I could say anything. The 10k was still in the same place I left it at last night, or this morning. This was another first. I walked down to the kitchen to make my smoothie and for the first time in a very long time, the portrait on the wall just bored the shit out of me. I got it down and went to the backyard. I placed it on the

braai stand and set it on fire. As the smoke went up it felt like it was taking whatever hold my ex had on me with it. I was freeing myself from her, and all it took was a woman whose name I still didn't know. Oh but I vowed to find her, no matter what it takes. And today I came face to face with her again. I took a risk even going to her office, but seeing her, I thought it would erase the lust I felt for her if I saw her in daylight. But that was just a dream. She looked better under the sun, and she seemed so different to the girl I met a few days ago. I needed to know her. I've never felt an urge like that before, but I knew I needed to have her again. Maybe this time I will be able to get her out of my system. All I have to do is take back control this time. But this girl seems like an enigma. While my body aches to be buried deep inside her warm folds, my mind is also yearning to know her and what makes her tick.

I need to speak to my therapist.

THE PLAYERS GUIDE

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The thing about running a business is that you always have to be on your toes. Especially being a young black woman running a successful business in a Male dominated industry, men are always waiting on the sidelines to watch you fail, and Adebowale Joshua was no different.

After spending a couple of days touching base with all my clients I can rest easy knowing they still trust me to protect their businesses. But I have to keep my eyes on the ball. I can't let Adebowale intimidate me. I've dealt with worse men than him. After all that running around I deserve a weekend to rest. I knocked off work and headed home. My friends, Simphiwe and Thobile are coming over for a night in.

Simphiwe is married to the most annoyingly nice man I've ever met. I know they say opposites attract but my mind still cant get over how he deals with her strong personality. But I guess it works for them because they have been married for two years and they seem happy. Thobile on the other hand is engaged to be married. Her fiancee is a doctor, smart, well spoken and handsome. The jury is still out on him. I dont trust him a hundred percent just yet. And then there's me. Single as they come. Although I do have a couple of friends with benefits that I keep on the side. A girl has needs and sometimes the silicone dick I keep in my drawer doesnt reach where it needs to reach, and that's when an FWB comes in.

I went past the mall and bought some snacks and wine at woolies. I took what I needed and headed to the tills. I paid and got out. As I was walking past the optometry at the mall I remembered I still have a couple of hours before my friends come over. I got into the optometrists shop and greeted the

receptionist.

"Hi, is Doctor Forbes available?" She smiled.

"I'll check." She picked up the phone and dialed his extension. "Hi doctor, there is a Miss...." she turned to look at me with her eyes popped out wanting to know my name.

"Majola." I answered. I've been here a few times and she still pretends like she doesn't know me. I indulge her all the time. A girl has some manners you know.

"Miss Majola is here to see you, can I send her in? Of course." She hung up. "You can go through. You can leave your trolley here." I smiled and pushed the trolley close to her desk and went in. I haven't been here in almost a month. But it still looked the same so I went straight to his office. I opened the door and went in. He was sitting on his desk looking rather scrumptious in his white coat. I closed the door and locked it.

"Doctor Forbes. I'm ready for my appointment." I walked closer to him and he had a smirk on his face. I took off my blazer and threw it on his couch. I saw him bite his lip when he saw the lacy crop top I had underneath the blazer. Lucky for me my boobs were a bit on the heavy side but they were perky so I got away without wearing a bra sometimes.

"You know Miss Majola, I thought you'd forgotten about me." He pulls his chair back allowing me to straddle him and put my arms on his shoulders.

"You're hard to forget Dr Forbes. Very hard." I answered feeling his bone hard erection under me. I reached down and took his lips in mine. I kissed him while his hands roamed around my behind, squeezing and fondling. I moved from his lips and went down his neck unbuttoning his shirt while at it.

I pulled his shirt out of his pants and ran my hands through his soft caramel skin. He sat up and I helped him take off his shirt and coat. He sat back down

again and I stood up. I unbuckled his belt and got down on my knees. I pulled his pants down and his dick jumped out like a spring. I took his dick in my hand and slid it up and down my warm hands. His moans and groans felt like an aphrodisiac to me. I moved my head closer to his dick and kissed the pink tip with its precum. I circled my tongue around his tip and his hand went onto my head. I could see by his closed eyes and moans that he wanted more. I ran my tongue under his dick making him scream. This is one of the reasons I like taking charge when it comes to sex. I like seeing men squirm and scream like little girls when they are aroused.

I brought my lips and tongue back to his tip and filled my mouth with his dick. His hand on my head made the thrusts in and out of my mouth so beautiful. I felt him push my head down leading his dick deeper into my throat making me gag. When I felt him getting close I pulled out and got up. I unzipped my skirt while he watched it fall to the floor. I sat up on his desk with my legs wide open. His

small red eyes got captivated as he watched me run my hands up and down my wet haven.

He follows the movement of my hands as they go up and down rubbing my clit. I move my hand and bring it up to my lips and suck on my wet fingers. He drags the chair closer to me. He picks my legs up and wraps them around his shoulders before burying himself in my coochie. I feel his tongue do its magic as it goes in and our of my hole while his finger rubs my clit sending all types of sensations all through my body. This is why I keep him around. His tongue works like a magic wand.

I feel my body give in and I vibrate with his mouth still stuck in my coochie. Once my orgasm comes to an end he stands up with the condom in his hand. I grab the condom from him and open it. I slide it down his dick slowly and seductively. I wrap my legs around his waist and lead his manhood into my feminine haven. One slow thrust and my legs pulling

him in he is fully in. His thrusts start slow and sensual. He keeps going and then picks up the pace making me scream his name in tongues. I hope there are no patients in the other rooms.

I feel my body convulsing as another orgasm hits me. He keeps going till he cums too. He kisses me then pulls out. He takes off the condom and reaches into his drawer. He takes out some wet wipes and cleans me up. When he is done he sits back on his chair naked watching me try to get my jelly legs to work again.

"So where have you been this past few weeks?" He asks.

"I've been busy."

"Too busy to pop in for a quicky?"

"I'm trying to make money Kevin, I cant just show up anytime, and you have a business to run." I'm trying so hard to avoid this conversation but theres only

one sure fire way to avoid it. Get out of here.

I get down from the desk and start getting dressed.

"You know most people cuddle after sex." I chuckle and continue.

"You have to work Kevin."

"Its knock off time."

"Then go home."

"Will you come with me?"

"I cant. I'm hosting my friends tonight."

"What about tomorrow?"

"I'll call you." I get my bag and walk towards the door.

"How long are we going to play this game Tivikele?"

Its moments like these when I wish I could shorten my name. Hearing someone say it like that feels so formal. I walk back to him and sit on top of his naked self.

"Look, I know what you want and I'm not ready for that. I don't think I have the time for a relationship right now. I'm still trying to build my business and I need to focus on that."

"So where does that leave us." See. This is what I said about clingy men. We just had sex and now there's an us. I seriously need to get out of here.

"Tell you what. I will make time and we will go out to dinner and we will talk about this properly. Cause right now I'm expecting guests and I can't talk for long."

"You promise?"

"I promise." I kissed him on the cheek and got up. I walked towards the door then turned to look at him. I blew him a kiss and walked out. I closed the door and let out a deep breath. I need to let him go. He's starting to catch feelings and I'm not here for that. It's a pity, I'll miss his dick. Oh well, there's plenty more fish in the sea.

I get my trolley from reception and head out. I can

tell the receptionist was pissed. I can't blame her though I was there longer than I should have been. I packed everything in my car and drove to my place. I unloaded my groceries and quickly took a shower. I put on my pyjamas and set up the snacks and drinks for my guests. As for food, Thobile will have to cook, she's a chef afterall.

At exactly seven o'clock they walk through the door.

"Hey girls." I hug them and we sit on the couch.

"You're glowing, did you just have sex?" Miss nosy pants Simphiwe asks.

"Maybe." I answer with a slick smile on my face.

"Who was it this time?" Thobile asks as she pours herself a glass of wine.

"Kevin Forbes. But I think this was the last time. He's starting to catch feelings and I'm not here for that."

"You do know it was bound to happen right. You can't be changing these men like your life depends on it. At some point one of them or even you will catch

feelings." Simz says. This one should quit her events management business and be a motivational speaker once.

"I know that. Which is why I'm letting him go. It's better that way."

"Have you told him?"

"Not yet. He thinks we are going to have dinner and be all lovey doveys."

"Such a pity, he was cute though." Thobi says.

Thobi decides to cook so Simz and I sit around the counter sipping on our wine watching her cook. My phone rings and Makhosi's number pops up. I don't even know why I saved it. He's another one that needs to be cut off. I let the call go to voicemail and my friends are looking at me. He calls again and Simz grabs phone from the counter.

"Tivikele Majola's phone how can I help you?..... yes she's here..... please hold." She hands me the

phone.

"What the fuck is wrong with you?" I whisper to her and she smiles and shrugs her shoulders. I turn to my phone.

"Hello!"

"Miss Majola, finally I get a hold of you."

"What can I do for you Mr Khuzwayo? It's late."

"My offer is still wide open."

"And like I said, i dont do get togethers."

"You can call it whatever you want. All I want is one night with you, with some food and drinks just to get to know you better." I sigh. He seems like the type that doesnt take no for an answer.

"I'll think about it."

"That's all I ask. Goodnight Miss Majola."

"Goodnight Mr Khuzwayo." I hang up and look up to find four big eyes staring at me. "What?"

"Spill!" Thobi says

"There's nothing to spill. He's just some annoying guy who is catching feelings."

"And you my friend don't play those games right?" Simz says sarcastically.

"Yes I dont do feelings. Besides, Makhosi Khuzwayo has enough women at his beck and call. I dont need that stress."

"Makhosi Khuzwayo as in Makhosi the player extraordinaire?" Thobi asks seemingly shocked.

"Yeah, him."

"What does he want with you?" Simz asks.

"Well, I had a one night stand with him and now he wont stop calling me." I sip my wine and these girls mouths are on the floor.

"You. Slept. With. Thee Makhosi Khuzwayo?" I nod my head. "So how is he? Is he as good as all the slay queens say?" Simz asks. If I didnt know better I would think she was single. I mean what married woman asks about another mans package when she

has her own waiting for her at home.

"He's okay?"

"Hha Tivikele Nomzamo Majola, he is just okay? I dont believe that." Simz says and Thobi nods her head in agreement and I laugh. Isn't this one supposed to be married.

"Okay, so he did give me a couple of mindblowing orgasms but that's where it ended. The next morning I found a stack of money on the side table."

"Did you take it?" Thobi loves money way too much.

"Of course not. I'm not some slay queen."

"Well that explains why he is chasing after you." I frown and look at Simz waiting for her to elaborate.

"Think about it. Where did he pick you up?"

"At his club. The night we went there to celebrate Thobi getting the contract to cater for the president's daughters wedding."

"Exactly. He picked you up at a club like most of his slay queens, you went home with him, had sex and

he left money for you like he always does for all the other women, you didn't take it. At that very moment you became almost like a mystery to him, the one that got away. And being the alpha man that he is, he needs to chase you and get you and only then will he be satisfied."

"Okay you just said a whole lot of nothing, Makhosi can dream until Jesus comes back, me and him will never be a thing. Trust me on that."

"Never say never." She says.

Thobi dished up for us and we ate while talking and laughing about anything and everything. I needed this little get together with my friends just to catch up on everything.

"Girls, let's make a toast." We lifted our glasses up. "Thank you for being my friends. Thobi we need to start planning your wedding." We toasted and sipped on our wine. This right here is all I need. My girls. Even though they have partners, for me, men are a no go zone right now. I'll just keep playing the role of

the rich Aunty who spoils her nieces and nephews until a man strong enough to handle a girl like me comes along. Until then, my girls will just be my happy place.

THE PLAYERS GUIDE

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Unedited ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

The downside of drinking wine the whole night is waking up the next morning with a hangover straight from the streets of hell. But we had a whole lot of fun though so it was worth it. And I'm not about to let this hangover get me down. I have a whole spa day planned with my friends today and I need to prep for it. Starting with breakfast.

I get up and go to the bathroom. I wash my face and brush my teeth then go to the kitchen to start on breakfast. Thobi might be the chef but she also deserves a break. I fry the eggs and bacon, sausages and mushrooms. I toast the bread and slice the tomatoes. I set everything up and then wake the girls up to join me.

"Goodmorning ladies." I say and they frown. "Stop being party poopers and smile. Breakfast is ready."

"Why are you so chirper so early in the morning? And why dont you have a hangover?" Simz asks as she takes a seat.

"I do have a hangover but you know me, I never allow anything to get to me, especially something I cant control."

"I wish i had your energy. My head feels like it will fall off." Thobi says resting her head on the table.

"Well then let's eat then we can go to a spa and relax a bit."

We eat our breakfast and then take turns showering. Well they do cause my room has an ensuite bathroom and I dont share my personal space. I get dressed then wait for these two in the lounge. The doorbell rings. I go and open and I am met with the biggest bouquet of red Rose's.

"Hi, Miss Majola?" The delivery guy asks. I'm pretty sure those flowers are heavy on his arm.

"That's me."

"Perfect. Please sign here for me." He hands me his clipboard. I sign and hand it back. He gives me the flowers then walks away. Security didn't alert me about a delivery. What if someone is trying to kill me and they just let anyone in. I need to have a word with them.

I place the flowers on the counter and look at them. I'm not sure who would send me flowers, Rose's even. I know it's not Kevin cause I stopped him from that a long time ago. Andile is in Durban so I know it's not him, plus he also doesn't like flowers.

According to him why buy you something that will wilt tomorrow instead of planting the flowers so you see them every day. I guess in his own way he is a bit romantic but he knows where to draw the line with me. So I know it's not him.

I stand there just staring at the flowers still trying to figure out who sent them. Thobi and Simz walk into the lounge and they go gaga over the flowers. If I didnt know better I'd say it's one of their men who sent the flowers but the delivery guy was specific when he said Miss Majola.

"Who are they from?" Thobi asks.

"I dont know." They are so huge I cant even see the top of them when they are on the counter.

"Isnt there a card?" Simz asks. She stands on tippy toes and looks at the top of the flowers. When she can't see what she's looking for she stands on the bar stool. "Got it." She says pulling a tiny envelope from the flowers. And instead of giving it to me she decides to open it and read whatever the note says. The smile on her face says its probably something romantic.

"What does it say?" I ask cause now it seems the flowers are hers. She clears her throat.

"Beautiful flowers for a beautiful flower. May these brighten up your day and remind you how beautiful you are. Love your future husband. M.K."

"Ncooh, that's so sweet." Thobi says.

"Right? So who is M.K?" Simz asks.

M.K. Makhosi Khuzwayo. First he shows up to my office unannounced, I dont remember even telling him my name. Then he calls me and I know I didnt give him my number and now he sends flowers to my house. What the fuck. Is he stalking me now? I need to put an end to this as soon as possible.

Theres a reason I never invite men to my place. My house is off limits. My office, I can let that go but invading my space is just crossing the line.

"Guys let's go, we'll be late for our booking." I grab my things and walk out with them following behind me. I lock my door and we get into the car.

"Are you okay?" Thobi asks as we drive out.

"I'm fine."

"You seem pissed. Who is M.K?" Simz asks.

"Makhosi Khuzwayo." They both scream scaring the shit out of me. "And then?"

"Makhosi Khuzwayo sent you flowers and you're pissed. Why?" Thobi asks clearly confused.

Explaining anything to them will be a waste of time. These two want me to be like them, find a man and settle down. Even if I had to do that I doubt Makhosi would be the man to do that with.

"Forget Makhosi, can we just enjoy ourselves. I booked every massage available plus manicures and pedicures. So let's focus on that." I saw them exchanging looks thought the rearview mirror but I decided not to pay attention to that.

We got to the spa and changed into gowns and slippers. We started with back massages. We laid on the beds as the ladies worked on our backs. I needed this more than I thought. And now with Makhosi stalking me I need to make sure I'm relaxed

so I can face him and tell him to back off. Simz's phone rang and she picked it up with the biggest smile on her face. Judging by her low voice and giggles we could tell she was talking to her husband. When she was done she hung up and turned to look at us with a smile plastered on her face.

"What?" She asked.

"I'll never be able to get over how you two click. Its been two years and I still don't get it." She laughs.

"Of course you wont. Themba was never my type, even in my wildest dreams I never imagined being with someone like him. But I decided to give him a chance and now we are happy." She answers with a huge grin on her face. "Plus he knows how to lay pipes and lay them well." We laugh.

"We'll take your word for it." Thobi says.

"You should. He might seem like he is too nice to people but once those bedroom doors close magic happens. Christian Grey needs to get some lessons from us." We laugh.

We did all our massages and ended up doing manicures and pedicures. When we were done we went to a restaurant to have a late lunch. And as if the universe was conspiring against me, Makhosi showed up in his farm uniform. He was wearing the typical Boer farm uniform of khaki shorts and shirt. He was with another person who was wearing blue overalls. They were carrying in crates of what looked like milk. I looked away hoping he wouldnt see me.

"Your boyfriend is coming over." Thobi whispered. I looked up and sure enough he was walking over. Shem, any other day I would be taken by him but right now I was getting pissed remembering him stalking me. I was hoping to do this with just us two but I guess theres no better time than the present.

"Ladies. Sanbonani (hello.)" He looks at my friends first before turning to me. And these two have huge grins on their faces. I'm pretty sure they think there will be sparks flying. If only they knew.

"Mr Khuzwayo." He frowns when he hears Simz call him by his surname.

"You know me?" He asks.

"Who doesn't? Everyone knows Makhosi Khuzwayo, player of note." Thobi answers him. He smiles at her.

"I guess my reputation does precede me."

"Of course it does. We know why you're here so we will leave you to it." Simz says and gets up. Thobi follows. Where are they even going? I drove them here.

"Y'all do remember I drove us here right?" I ask them.

"There's something called uber's. I'll come back for my car and our stuff." Thobi says and they quickly walk out like they are mice running away from a cat. Makhosi pulls out the seat and sits down. The eyes all over the restaurant glaring at us are unmissable. I wonder how long it will be before my face is splashed on the gossip pages as one of his latest conquests.

He stares at me and I stare right back with my arms crossed on my chest.

"You look beautiful." He leans closer with his elbows on the table.

"How did you get my home address?" He smiles.

"I take it you got my little gift." He seems impressed with himself.

"I did. I'm pretty sure the trash can looks beautiful with those red Rose's in it." His smile disappears for a hot second then he chuckles.

"You're hard to impress Miss Majola, but I love a challenge."

"I dont need you to impress me Makhosi, I need you to respect my space. My home is off limits." I can feel the rage rising up from deep inside me.

"It was just a gift. It's not that big a deal."

"To you maybe. To me, it was an invasion of my privacy. You might not have set foot there but going behind my back and getting my home address from wherever you got it, you crossed the line."

"So I'm not allowed to know where you live but you know where I live?" He really doesn't get it does he?

"You invited me to your house, I didn't invite you to mine. So please do me a favor, stay away from me and stop showing up at my office without an appointment, and lose my number." I got up and walked out.

I drove back to my place and the sight of the Rose's made me want to puke. I took the flowers and went down to the trash bins. I met a lady along the way who admired the flowers so I gave them to her. I went back to my flat and blocked Makhosi's number from my phone. Filled the tub and took a long hot shower with my silicone dick right there to keep me company.

I remembered I forgot to pay the bill at the restaurant. I looked at the time and it was still early, I'm sure they were still open. I got my phone and called them. Someone answered.

"Hi, yes I was there earlier with a couple of friends. I just remembered I forgot to pay. I was wondering if I can come by tomorrow to pay."

"Miss Majola, right?" The lady asks.

"Yes, that's me."

"Okay, dont worry about it. The gentlemen you were with already took care of the bill." Shit. Now I owe him.

"Okay, thanks. If i may ask, how much was the bill?"

"Uhm... let me check." I hear papers shuffling and then the keyboard clicking. "Okay, it was 980.98."

"Thank you very much. Goodnight." I hung up, unblocked him, sent him a thousand rands and then blocked him again. Now I owe no one anything.

MAKHOSI

I've never been good at taking rejection, when I know what I want I go after it until I have it. And right now what I want is Tivikele Majola. She doesn't know it yet but she will be mine. I just need to be patient.

My brother and I drove back to the farm after doing our last round of deliveries at the restaurant. I must admit though, my ego was a bit bruised. I mean I've met girls who've fallen at my feet just by me greeting them. And now there's this one girl who seems so close yet so elusive, and she's doing all in her power to push me away.

"So that's the girl you asked me to look into?" My brother asks as we drive home.

"Yes." He chuckles.

"From the looks of it I don't think she likes you very much. So how are you going to marry her?" He is the

only person who knows about my sudden infatuation with Tivikele. He is also the one I'm closest to of my brothers. Or maybe it's because he is the youngest, I'm the oldest and I've always felt like I had to be protective of him. It didn't help that Sphetho was a naughty child. And his naughtiness led him to the wrong crowd. He is smart though, street smart, he knows everything and everyone. He can find anything and everything in this big green earth. In every family I believe there is always that one shady character who likes to cause trouble. Sphetho is only twenty one but I can already tell he is going to be the uncle who knows everyone's business and secrets and he'll be ready to use them at anytime. He is a rebel by nature and he refuses to conform to society's standards. Even getting him to work with me on the farm was a struggle and a half. But schools are closed now and we need to keep him busy so he doesn't end up going back to old habits. And sometimes we do like to use his street smarts. We just need to be careful how far we go. And asking him to find out who Tivikele was, was just a minor thing.

"I dont know. But where there's a will there's always a way." He laughs.

"If you need help just tell me, I can get her for you." Oh did i forget to mention he is also one charming motherfucker and he knows it. He is the only one who took our dads yellow bone skin. And you know what they say about light skin niggas.

"I will get her on my own Thank you very much. Right now she's just mad I sent flowers to her place. Apparently I'm not supposed to know where she lives."

"Well in this day and age, can you blame her?"

"I guess not. But now I need to apologize for invading her privacy, but how do I do that without making her mad, again?"

"I'm the one who should be asking you for advice. Not the other way round." He has a point there. But I've never encountered a problem like this before so I do need advice.

We drive into the farm and my phone beeps. It's a message. I open it and it's an ewallet.

'Majola Tivikele N sent R1200 blah bloody blah.' This girl is nuts. Hwr food didnt even cost this much. What is she trying to say?

I try to call her but her phone doesnt even send me to voicemail, it just beep beeps and then go off. She must have blocked me. Oh this is going to be an uphill battle.

THE PLAYERS GUIDE

4

I havent spoken to Makhosi in a week. The fresh air I've been having is so surreal, it feels like I went back to before I slept with him. I wish I could go back in time and undo that night. But you know what they say, nyobile nyobile. You can't un nyoba someone.

I have an interview today for an intern. I'm not sure when we decided to take interns but Pinky seems to think he could be a great asset to us. I trust her so I will grant this interview. I've been in my office working, I have an hour before this interview happens. Pinky knocks and walks in before I can even tell her to come in. She has a huge grin on her face.

"What?" The grin wont leave her face and she seems

too giddy for my liking.

"You have a guest." I say a silent prayer asking God to not let it be Makhosi.

"Who is it?"

"I'll go get him." She floats out of the office and in less than a minute she walks back with her arm hooked on my brothers arm. I try to conceal the smile on my face but it's kind of hard with her grinning the way that she is. Her little crush on Mabutho will not end well. Not only does he have a serious girlfriend, he is also too playful for his own good. And him even allowing her to be that close to him might not be the right move. She will catch feelings and then get hurt.

"This is your guest." The grin will be permanently plastered on her face for the rest of the day.

"Mabutho, how are you." I get up and give him a hug.

"I'm okay. I didnt know you work with such beautiful people." He says looking at Pinky. And this is what I

mean when I say things will not end well. He has been here a few times before and he still pretends like it's the first time he sees her. And for the life of me I don't understand why she finds this amusing.

"Can I get you anything?" She asks looking at my brother.

"I'd like a cup of coffee please." I answer.

"I was actually talking to him." She answers. And here I was thinking she is my employee.

"Ngyabonga Nkosazana, a cup of tea would be nice." I dont know what it is about Zulu men and their ability to charm the pants off of a woman just by calling them Nkosazana or Ntokazi. Pinky is literally floating on air right now. She nods her head and walks out. Mabutho is looking at her ass. And I'm pretty sure she can feel it cause she turns around and smiles looking at him.

"You need to stop doing that." I sit back down on my

seat and he takes a seat across from me.

"Doing what? It's not my fault she has a crush on me." He says with a smirk on his face.

"I'm serious Mabutho. Dont encourage her. I don't want her getting hurt."

"Relax. She wont."

"Hows your girlfriend? What's her name again, Crystal with a C." He chuckles.

"She's fine. I was thinking about proposing to her last week."

"Ok, so what happened. Did she say yes?"

"I didnt do it. I found out she's been talking to her ex."

"Her baby daddy?"

"Yep. As much as I understand they share a child together, he hasn't been in the picture for almost six years now. I've been raising Thando, and then he shows up and suddenly wants to play daddy. I dont know man, maybe I'm being paranoid but I feel like theres more going on."

"You want me to hack her calls?" He frowns before he gets my joke and chuckles.

"No thank you. If something is going on, it will reveal itself. The truth has a way of doing that. Besides, you're no hacker." Pinky comes back with a white tray with gold trimmings. There is a white ceramic teapot on it and a cup and saucer. There's a side plate with some biscuits. She places the tray in front of Mabutho. I didn't even know we had this kind of cutlery in the office.

"Here you go." She takes the lone coffee mug and hands it over to me before serving my brother. And I mean proper serving, all that's left is for her to get down on her knees and call her Baba. And this whole time this idiot brother of mine has a smile on his face and he is watching her movements.

I let them have their little moment and sip on my coffee. It's almost cold but the tea is scalding hot. I can see by the steam coming out of the teapot. As soon as she hands him the cup of tea she also

hands him a biscuit. I try to take one but she smacks my hand away. I swear I'm being tested right now. When their little show is done she walks out grinning from ear to ear.

"Can I have a biscuit." He smiles and bites into the creamy biscuit.

"Nope. What if they have a love portion, these are mine."

"Whatever. I need your help with something."

"What?"

"Adebowale Joshua. He has been snooping around my business. About a week ago he offered me the position of head of IT in his company."

"Isn't he head of IT at Joshua Industries?"

"He is. But rumour has it he wants to turn the entire department into a stand alone business."

"So he offers you the head of IT position thus gaining your clients too?"

"Exactly. As much as my clients are loyal and have sworn allegiance to me, I still need to get him in check."

"I'll set you up with a meeting with his father, he is the only human being Wale fears. Get him on your side and you will never have to worry about his son ever again."

"Okay, and how will I meet him? A zoom call, or what?"

"Oh no babygirl, you'll have to fly to Nigeria for that. I'll make the bookings."

"You'll come with me?"

"Nope. This is your business Tivikele, some battles you need to fight on your own. But dont worry, Joshua senior is a reasonable man. Plus you're my sister so that works in your favour."

"Okay. How do you know Joshua senior?"

"I met him through a friend of mine, he needed a replacement pilot while his pilot was on paternity leave so the friend suggested me."

"How come you didnt tell me that?" He chuckles.

"Because sweetness, I sign NDA's which dont permit me to talk about my clients and their shady trips."

"But you just talked about this one."

"Well this one has a soft spot for me. So we've become friends. Get your Visa ready and you'll be on the next plane out soon as I get the meeting set."

"Okay. Thanks bro. I owe you one."

"Yes you do."

Pinky popped her head in and told me my interviewee was here. I lost track of time, but it's just an interview, nothing major. Mabutho said his goodbyes and Pinky walked him out. I heard a knock on the door and when I said come in a fresh faced, light skinned boy walked in. I say boy and not man because he doesnt look anything over 18. He came with a smile on his face, I'm pretty sure high school girls go crazy everytime he enters a room, and he seems to know it too.

"Miss Majola, it's such an honor to finally meet you." He said with his arm stretched out for a handshake. I got up and shook his hand. His handshake is firm and manly.

"It's nice to meet you too Mr....."

"Bhengu. Sphetho Bhengu."

"Shongololo, please have a seat." He takes a seat and places his file on the desk. "So my PA tells me you are interested in joining our team."

"Very interested. I've done my research and know that you have a standing contract with the University of Johannesburg to offer their IT students internships, I go to University of Pretoria, but I thought I'd try my luck." Ok. He's done his research, I like a dedicated individual.

"So, tell me what drew you to T.N.M Technologies?"

"Well, to be quite honest I'm not really studying IT but I have a love for it. And it would benefit me to learn about it, straight from the experts."

"Lecturers are experts too."

"True. But I want the hands on experience. I've been trying to teach myself a bit here and there but a mentor would be a great help."

"So you want a mentor more than anything?"

"A bit of both, because I also want to go into business later on and that's what I'm studying now, business management. I want to go into the Technology industry, we are moving into the future anyway."

"I hear you. We don't usually take interns at this time but I'll speak to my HR manager and when we do open up you will be the first person on the list."

"I can volunteer and work for free. I really dont mind."
Wow okay. Now I dont have another excuse.

"Okay, I'll speak to HR, be here first thing Monday morning."

He smiles so much I can see his last tooth. He stands up and shakes my hand.

"I'll be here first thing. Thank you so much." He walks out really happy. I send an email to my HR manager letting her know about our new staff member.

I continue with work and get lost in it. Just before knock off time I get an email from my brother. My flight is set for tomorrow morning, meeting booked and my Visa is still valid from the trip my girls and i took a few months ago. Wale wont know what hit him. My phone rings and I pick it up.

"Majola."

"Nkosazana." Only one person calls me that. Andile's father. He is one of my clients and he has been trying to get me to marry Andile. If only he knew.

"Baba, unjani Mzilikazi ka Mashobane (how are you?)"

"Inyama isehlangene nomphefumulo ntokazi, (the body and soul are still United.) So we cant complain."

"I'm happy to hear that. What can I do for you Baba?"

"I got a visit from some man today with a proposal. He claims he can protect my company better than you can."

"Let me guess, Adebowale Joshua?"

"That's the one. Do you know him?"

"Unfortunately. Let's just say he is slowly becoming a pest."

"I have a talent of getting rid of pests. Do you want me to help you?"

"No thank you, I think I'll handle him for now. But if he gets too much I'll definitely contact you."

"Okay. I'll be waiting. So vele you still won't marry Andile?" That's how most of our conversations go. Somewhere somehow he has to bring in Andile. I laugh.

"I'm still thinking about it." His throaty coarse laugh permeates through the phone.

"You've been thinking for three years now. You need to make a decision."

"Tell you what, I'll talk to Andile and then we'll take it from there."

"Mxm, this is your way of getting rid of me. I know you. Goodbye MaSobiya. Sizokhuluma ke. (We'll talk.)"

"Kulungile baba. (Okay.) Bye."

I hang up. Wale is really messing with my bag. And I dont take kindly to that. I take deep breaths and calm myself down. Tomorrow I'll put an end to his little shenanigans. I don't know why he cant just find his own clients and work from the bottom up like we all did. I take the phone and dial another number.

"My future wife." He answers soon as he picks up the phone.

"Hha ah. Don't call me that. You sound like someone else who just declared themselves my future husband." He laughs making me laugh too. I've known Andile since high school. We were good

friends until a couple of years ago when our friendship evolved to include sex. As much as we are still friends we both can still draw the line between the friends and benefits part of our relationship. His father on the other hand would give an arm and a leg to have us combine those two, for life.

"Who is that brave? Do they know you?" He asks still laughing.

"Mxm. Don't even go there. I just spoke to your dad."

"Let me guess, he asked you when we're getting married?"

"You know him."

"When are you coming to Durban. I miss you."

"You miss me or my vagina."

"Both. But mostly you."

"Unfortunately it wont be anytime soon. I have to fly to Nigeria tomorrow for a meeting."

"Then come sleep over here, you'll take the flight

from here."

"Not happening. But you could come up."

"Are you serious?"

"Yep. I have about 14 hours before I fly out so if you make it here before then we might just have a quickie."

"My flight leaves in two hours. Usual place?"

"Yep."

"Perfect. I'll see you soon."

THE PLAYERS GUIDE

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Unedited ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

I knocked off work and drove straight to my place. I needed to pack first before I go meet up with Andile. I get home and take a quick shower. I get out and pack my little luggage. I'm not planning on staying long in Lagos so a couple of outfits will do.

I finish packing and put the luggage by the bedroom door. I havent seen Andile in wreks now. Contrary to popular belief, as much as I love and enjoy sex, I've only had sex with two people in the past two years. Andile and Kevin. Well three now if you count Makhosi. I roll my eyes even at the thought of him. I open my lingerie drawer trying to decide what to wear. I settle on a black lacy bra that is see through and shows my nipples. I put on a matching thong

and some thigh high stockings. I hold the stockings up with a garter that rests around my waist. I turn to the mirror on the corner and I must say, I look good.

I get my trench coat and put it on. I look good, but I don't want people getting ideas. I'm pretty sure there are a lot of people who would have too many questions if they saw me in this outfit. Afterall it's a hot summer night. I take the trench coat off and put on a black floor length sheath wrap maxi dress with a plunging neckline that exposes the lacy bra a bit, not too much just a bit. The dress only wraps around the waist and has a slit that goes from the top of my thigh down to the floor. The slit exposes the stockings and the garter belt, only if I let the slit open, but, that is just reserved for one person so I'll be holding the slit closed till I get to where I'm going.

I finish off my look with the Amina Muaddi Begum black satin slingback pumps. They are comfortable, but sexy. I spray some perfume and leave my weave

untied. Red lipstick for some pop of color and I'm good to go. I grab a small red clutch bag and off I go. I walk towards the lift. I press the button and wait. I live on the fifth floor but it feels like the lift is taking forever to get here. When it does, it opens up to reveal a bunch of guys. Their chat and laughter stop when they see me. If I ever needed a confirmation that I looked good, I just got it.

"Gentlemen." I said with a smile on my face and got in the lift. Lucky for me they were also young down. We got to the ground floor and I got off. Walking across the foyer with eyes staring at me made me a bit nervous. The guys in the lift I could handle, but the many people in the foyer, and some sitting in the little coffee shop downstairs made me nervous. I walked till I made it to the parking lot. I let out a sigh as soon as I was in my car.

I drove out and headed to our favorite restaurant, Signature, in Morningside. I get there and our table

has been booked. As usual Andile requested a table that has a bit of privacy and they delivered. I order wine and wait for him to show up. He texts me telling me he is fifteen minutes away. Not too much time but I can do some research on Joshua senior in the meantime.

I find the email that Pinky sent me with all the details on him. He seems like a hardworking individual, and an ethical one too. But then again you can never confirm a person. He doesn't seem to like being photographed judging by the few pictures I get of him. Even when I go to google they show the same pictures that Pinky has. One thing is obvious though, he is an older version of his conniving son, just a little hotter.

I feel someone's presence looking down on me. I smile thinking its Andile. He lied about being fifteen minutes late. I look up and my smile leaves me stranded. All I have now on my face is a grin.

"Hi!" He says looking straight at my eyes.

"Hello."

"You're waiting for someone?" He asks.

"I am. What can I do for you?"

"I wanted to apologize for sending ths flowers to your house. I didnt know you were so particular about your space being respected. I'll remember that next time." He says a cute smirk plastered on his face. I'm not sure how genuine his apology is, but I'll take it.

"Thank you."

"Can I buy you a bottle of wine, just to say sorry?"

"Thank you. But I'm good."

"Maybe next time then." Ain't gonna happen chief, I say to myself.

"We will see." He smiles and I pray he walks away but he doesn't. He opens his mouth to say something but Andile beats him to it.

"Hey babe, sorry I'm late." He says and gives me a perk on the cheek before pulling the chair out to sit. I dont know why I felt the need to look at Makhosi, his smile had dissapeared and his jaws were clenched. He was looking at Andile almost like he wanted to punch him in the face or kill him. I wasnt sure.

"Andile, this is Makhosi Khuzwayo, Makhosi this is Andile Khumalo." I say hoping to break the tension that's forming right now. Andile stands up and extends his hand to him.

"Her boyfriend. Nice to meet you." Makhosi shakes his hand and turns to look at me.

"I'll see you around." I watch him as he walks away. He seems hurt. Or that's just his ego being bruised. I dont know why I feel bad for him, but he's a big boy, he'll live.

"Have you ordered?" Andile asks bringing my mind back to him.

"Not yet. Just drinks." He calls the waiter over and places our order. Its easy for him to order for me cause I usually eat the same thing all the time.

"So, who was that guy?" He asks.

"No one important." We have our dinner and when we are done eating he pays the bill while I go out to get the car.

"You didnt tell me you had a boyfriend." A voice says behind me. I turn around and he is standing there with a beautiful woman in his arm. I smile.

"Well you didnt tell me you had a girlfriend, a gorgeous one at that." I say looking at the girl. She smiles and blushes.

"Thank you." She says.

"I guess we've both kept things from each other."

"Clearly. It was nice to meet you beautiful." I say to the girl and turn and walk away. I unlock the car and get on the passenger side.

Andile comes out after about two minutes and gets on the driver's side. We drive to my old apartment in Hyde park. Andile hasn't been to my new place. It's been a year since I moved there and very few people know. A lot of the time when I have guests coming or some family members, except my parents and siblings, I bring them here.

I press the gate remote and the gate slides open. He parks the car and we go in. The moment he closes the door he pulls me to him and looks straight in my eyes while untying my dress. It opens up to reveal the lingerie and he pushes me back a bit to take in the sight before him. He smiles and licks his lips. I take a few steps back and let the dress fall of my shoulders. I turn and walk up the stairs with him watching me. As soon as I disappear from his sight I hear footsteps, but they don't seem to be coming up the stairs. I'm not worried though cause I know he is coming.

I get into the bedroom and I'm the lights. I lay on the bed and wait for him. He shows up with a glass in his hand. He walks towards the bed and places the glass on the side table. He unbuttons his shirt watching me while I squeeze my boobs and run my hand all over me. He takes off his pants and is only left with his boxers. The bulge in his briefs is clear for me to see.

He dips his hand in the glass and comes back with an ice cube. He puts the ice cube in his mouth the leans down to kiss me. The coldness of his lips and mouth mixed with the heat in mine creates a whole other scientific explosion. The ice moves between our lips and mouths. I dont know when he got another ice cube, I just feel it run between my boobs. The coldness sending shivers all over me. He moves from my lips and Carrie's the ice to my boobs. He sucks my boobs through the lace while simultaneously moving the ice cube around my nipple. I can feel my nipple getting hard. He moves to the other breast and does the same thing. His one

hand is running an ice cube between my coochie lips and my clit.

My coochie is dripping wet, my juices mixed with the melting ice cube drive me nuts. He pulls away from my boobs and stands up. He pulls me towards him and my legs rest around his waist. He lifts one leg up and kisses it from my toes all the way up to my thigh. He unhooks the garter and rolls down the stocking while leaving cold kisses on my leg. He moves to the other leg and does the same thing before pulling down my thong.

He gets down on his knees and his cold tongue comes into contact with my warm coochie. His tongue makes it's way inside me sucking up my juices. I hold on to his head and bury him deeper into me. My clit screams hallelujah when he gives it attention. He sucks and gently pulls on it till I feel myself close to the edge. He pulls away just as I'm about to cum. My body goes mission abort and the

orgasm recedes back to wherever it came from. I feel like kicking him in the balls right now, but I still need them buried deep inside me so I let him be.

He pulls down his briefs exposing his immaculate banana shaped dick. I sit up and hold on to his dick. I gently pull him forward till he is right next to me. I kiss the tip of his dick. I see him close his eyes as he enjoys the pleasure. I get a condom from the drawer and run it down his dick. He still thinks I'm giving him a hand job.

When the condom is fully in I push him onto the bed and the shock on his face is funny to watch. I get on top of him and slide down his dick till it's all in and I'm sitting comfortably on him. I stay still while he lays there with his eyes closed waiting for me to move. But I dont. He groans a bit before opening his eyes. He finds me staring right back at him.

"What?" He asks. His red tiny eyes are just

screaming for me to move.

"I should be asking you that." I say. I draw circles around his dick.

"What did I do?" He asks with his eyes half closed.

"You left me hanging. I was so close to an orgasm and you denied me that. Do you know how rare an orgasm can be for women?" I ask moving forward and backwards on him. I'm going to get rid of that smirk on his face. I start moving, up and down, left and right, forward and backwards. He holds on to my thighs and I feel him. He is getting close. I quickly pull out and lay on the bed facing the ceiling. I feel his eyes burning into me. I know what's coming next. And boy have I been waiting for it.

He says nothing, instead he rolls me over till I'm laying on my stomach. He inserts himself inside me then lays on my back. All that's moving is his bottom part as he pumps into me, hard and fast. He keeps going and the pace gets faster and faster. He gets off my back and pulls me till I'm laying on my side

with my one leg in the air. He pumps harder and harder, I swear his balls are going to make an entrance too. I squirt all over him and scream his name loud I'm sure the neighbors heard me.

Just when I think we are done, well I am, he pulls me to the edge of the bed and he stands on the floor. With my legs on his chest and his face between my feet he makes his entrance. He holds my legs tight and drills into me till I cum again. This time he cums with me. He opens my leg and gets on top of me. He kisses me while I try to catch my breath.

"I know the little games you play Tivikele." That's what he thinks. And I know exactly how to get what I want. Tonight i wanted a proper pounding and i got it. He thinks he did it his way so I'll let him be. Sometimes it's okay to make men think they are in charge. But we know better. Before long he is snoring on top of me. I gently push him onto the bed and go to the bathroom. I take a shower. I get out

and go back downstairs. I get my phone and set the alarm. I cant afford to miss my flight. A message comes through and it's from an unknown number.

'You could have been honest with me about your boyfriend then I wouldnt have made a fool of myself running after you. But it's fine, I wont bother you again.'

No need to guess where that message is coming from. Makhosi needs to take a chill pill. He cant be mad at me when he himself was on a date tonight. Besides, how did a one night stand get so complicated?

I walk back upstairs and he is sprawled out on the bed, how is he even going to sleep on the wet bed. Oh well, he is a grown ass man, he knows what he is doing. I go to the guest room and get into bed and sleep. Tomorrow is a brand new day.

THE PLAYERS GUIDE

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Unedited ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

"Andile, wake up. We have to go. I dont want to miss my flight." He groaned and turned the other way. I dont even know when he joined me in the guest bedroom. Its 3AM and I need to be at the airport by five. My flight leaves at seven. Good thing I packed already, that would have wasted my time.

He doesn't wake up. Instead he keeps snoring. I quickly go down to the kitchen and come back with a bucket of ice cold water.

"I'm counting down from five. If you're not up by the time I get to one I'm throwing this ice cold bucket of water over you." He pulls the cover up and hides his head. He thinks I'm joking. I'm dressed and ready to go but I need him to drive me to the airport. Driving

myself there and leaving the car in the parking lot would just be a tad bit expensive. So I need his help.

"Five....Four.....Three.....Two.....One." I pull the cover away and empty the bucket on top of him. His body shakes and he jumps off the bed.

"What the fuck is wrong with you?" He asks between clenched teeth. He is shivering.

"I warned you. Go take a shower."

"Dude, its three AM. What the fuck?"

"And I have two hours to get to the airport. And you're driving me. So get on it." I clap my hands and he mumbles something as he walks to the bathroom.

When I hear shower running I leave him there and go downstairs. I make two cups of coffee and fill two thermal mugs with the hot liquid. I put sugar and milk in his and wait for him. Five minutes later he walks down, dressed and sulking. He's so cute when he pretends to be angry. I hand him the coffee and

he takes it.

"You look ugly when you sulk. How's your coffee?"

"Hotter than the water I got as a wake up call." I want to laugh but I'm not willing to piss him off some more. I still need a driver.

"Okay, I'm sorry. That was a tad bit more dramatic. Please forgive me." I wrap my arms around his waist and look up to his sulking face.

"No. First you left me alone in the bed with your squirt all over and then you woke me up with ice cold water. It will take more than that face to make me forgive you."

"How about I show you my new place?" A frown forms on his face. He knows I dont like people in my private space. Ever since I moved from here he also didnt know where I stayed.

"Are you sure about that?"

"Well you do need to drive me there to get my bag, and then you'll drive me to the airport then drive to

the office to hand over the house and car keys to Pinky."

"I just realised something."

"What?" I ask freeing him from my hold and sipping my coffee.

"You didn't ask me yet. Ask nicely and I will think about all these errands you want me to run." He says with a smirk on his face. He pulls the chair out and sits down with his elbows on the kitchen island.

I know what he is trying to do. He wants me to be stubborn, as always and that would give him the upper hand. But I know which buttons to press to get my way. I pull out the chair next to him and sit down. I swing his chair around so that he is facing me. With my hands on his thighs, moving up and down, I look at him straight in the eyes.

"Khumalo! Mntungwa, Mbulazi Omnyama, Nina KaBhej` ese Ngome, Nin` enadlu muntu nimyenga

ngendaba, Nin`enadla izimfe zimbili ikhambi laphuma lilinye, Lobengula ka Mzilikazi, Mzilikazi ka Mashobanana, Shobana no Gasa ka Zikode, Zikode kaMkhatshwa, okhatshwe ngezind izinyawo nangezimfushanyana, Umkhatshwa wawo Zimangele."

"Okay stop. Let's go." He says trying to hide his blushing face and his erect penis. Mission accomplished. I havent concluded my studies yet but I can safely say, remind a Zulu man about his ancestors and heritage and he will melt in your hands. Well most of the ones I know anyway.

He grabs the car keys and locks the door as soon as we are out. We get into the car and he drives towards my place, thanks to modern technology I dont have to give him directions, the GPS does that for me.

"So when last did you hear from Gavin?" He aks, catching me off guard.

"Uhm... it's been a while. I guess he is respecting the protection order against him."

"And his wife?"

"Last I heard, she was sentenced to five years for aggravated assault."

"That's good. Atleast you can sleep better now."

"Yeah. And Gavin has given up trying to contact me. I cant believe I almost died because of that idiot."

Andile reaches out and takes my hand in his comforting me.

Gavin and I met three years ago. He was cute. A charmer. He was from Cape Town and Colored. I dont remember what attracted me to him. I told him I don't do relationships and he was cool with that. We had our little entanglement, little did I know it was a real entanglement. The man was married and he had forgotten to tell me that. As much as I have zero problem with casual sex, I draw the line at married men. That's a line I'd rather not cross.

One morning almost eighteen months ago I woke up to a knock on my door. I thought it was just a neighbor but it wasn't. When I opened the door an angry Colored woman stood there with her two friends. Being the observant person that I am I noticed they had some containers. That alone didn't send my heart racing, it was them wearing gloves on the hands with the containers that raised my antenna.

"Can I help you?" I asked the one in the middle since it looked like she was the one in charge.

"Open the gate." She said referring to the burglar door. She spoke in a thick Colored accent. I put two and two in my head and I knew this had something to do with Gavin.

"Why? I don't know you. Say what you want." She chuckled and spoke to her friends in Afrikaans. I didn't need an interpreter to know they were talking about me.

"I'm not going to ask you again. Open the bloody

gate." She shouted. I heard doors and burglar doors being opened and I knew my neighbours were up. I heard them say something about security before they quickly opened their containers.

I'm no sangoma or medium but I could have sworn I heard my ancestors say move. I jumped behind the door and a second later whatever liquid was in those containers was now spread all over my floor. The security was able to drag them away. I told them to call the cops. When the cops showed up they examined the liquid on the floor. They took samples and my statement and left. I realised whatever that liquid was, it was dangerous. The few spatters of it that had made it to my couch and rug had actually burnt them. Even trying to clean it was a struggle.

A few days later the cops told me the liquid was raw hydrochloric acid. Not the kind you find in toilet cleaners and what not, this one was meant to burn through my skin and kill me. I hadn't heard from

Gavin. I told the cops I wanted to open a charge. I was told she had already been charged with trespassing and disorderly conduct. When they found out about the liquid her charges went up to aggravated assault. Only then did Gavin try to contact me.

When I found out about his marriage in court i almost pissed myself. I guess I somehow understood where the woman was coming from, but to try and burn me for something I didn't even know about, that I couldnt forgive. I wanted the law to take its course. To it's full extent. Well it did help that my big brother Bahole had connections in the police force, and the prosecutor who took my case was a neighbor from back home.

Gavin begged for me to drop the charges, telling me what she did was a mistake. If she had come there to beat me up, maybe I could consider the mistake part, even though I'd know it wasn't but I'd feign

naivety. But this woman and her friends had one mission in mind, to burn me alive with that acid. I've seen what acid can do to people, so that was no mistake. Unfortunately for her, her friends turned on her and became state witnesses. I got my protection order for Gavin, he still tried to contact me, which is why I ended up moving from my place to the new place. And that's why I hate having people in my space uninvited.

"Nice place." Andile said as we pulled up to the parking lot of my apartment building. This one was a bit safer than the last. The security was tighter.

"Thanks." We went in and registered him with the security. His fingerprints were taken. I told you security was tight. I reminded security about Pinky house sitting this weekend. Her fingerprints are already on the system. Even though they know her, she still has to check in like every other guest.

We got up to my apartment and while Andile was

busy admiring the place I changed into some comfortable clothes. I grabbed my luggage and walked out.

"This place is beautiful. You have taste."

"Of course I do. Let's go. I'm already late."

He drove me to the airport and watched me board my flight. Nine and a half hours later we landed in Lagos. I was relaxed and ready for my meeting tomorrow. There was a car with the Joshua Industries logo on it. I got in the backseat and the driver drove me to the George Lagos Hotel. I was shown to my room. I decided to take a shower and then go have dinner at the hotel restaurant.

I got a table and sat down with my iPad in hand. Pinky had emailed me more info about Wale. Apparently he had contacted two more of my clients. Dont get me wrong, competition is good, heck I deal with it every single day, but what I wont tolerate is the unethical ways Wale is going about it. Poaching

clients is something people do all the time, but most sane people dont target one person and try to sabotage them. And Wale is on a mission to destroy me. Now I refuse to have that.

I was busy on my laptop when someone cleared their throat. I looked up and Joshua senior was standing before me. I didnt need to be told who he was, he is an older version of Wale, and dare I say way more handsome. I'm not sure if it's the grey hair or his smile, but he looked good.

"Can I help you?" His smile widens. He pulls the chair out and sits down.

"Your brother told me a lot about you. He forgot to mention how beautiful you are."

"Well I try. So what are you doing here? I thought our meeting was tomorrow."

"It should be. But I'm here, you're here. We might as well talk." A waiter brings an ice bucket with a bottle of wine and a tray with a bottle of whiskey and two glasses. "I hope you dont mind. I took the liberty of

ordering our drinks." He says as he pours the wine and hands me the glass.

"Thank you."

"So, Miss Majola, what can I do for you?"

"Your son. I need you to get him off my back."

"Okay, you'll have to be more specific." His eyes are roaming all over my open chest. The silk spaghetti dress I'm wearing is the only thing I packed that is free and can give me a bit of air. I swear men are all the same, in every age. Bayafana nje.

"Over a week ago your son Adebowale asked me for a meeting, I agreed and he offered me the position of head of IT in his company."

"I hope the offer was generous?"

"It was. However I run an IT business, so I dont need to be head of IT anywhere, however i also found out why he wanted me there, he wanted my clients since he is looking to make your IT department

independent."

"Come now Miss Majola, healthy competition never killed anyone."

"True, but sabotage and trying to destroy my company is something I can't tolerate. I spoke to your some and he refuses to listen. Now consider this the last and final warning. If he doesn't back off, I won't be held responsible for what I'll do to him."

His smile has disappeared, and a frown had taken over.

"I hear you. I'll speak to him. And I'll get him off your back."

"Thank you. And just so you know, if he was genuine in his intentions I would have had no problem working with him, introduce him to people and help him secure clients, but he came to me sideways, and I really do not appreciate that." The smile was back on his face.

"Understood. I guess, what do the young people say, he fumbled the bag."

"I guess so."

"Thank you for speaking to me about this. I try to run my business as ethically as possible, and what Wale has been doing is beyond disgraceful. But we'll sort it out. Not to worry."

"Thank you. And thank you for your time."

"I'd do anything for Mabutho. He is a hardworking young man, I'd trade all my children for a son like your brother." Okay. I'm pretty sure this is TMI. But I like news so.

"Really? Why is that?"

"All my kids care about is shopping and partying. Even getting Wale to join the company was a struggle, and now he is going around creating enemies." I know I should feel sorry for him, but I'm pretty sure his kids are spoilt. My grandmother told my mom that if she doesn't raise us, then she'll have to raise her grandkids, but if she raises us then she'll get to spoil her grandkids, so my mum made sure to remind us that respect and loyalty goes a long way, and no matter how much money you have, it will

never you cant buy respect or loyalty, and if you dont have that, well I dont know what you have.

"I'm sorry to hear that. Maybe one day they will come around."

"I doubt that. Tell you what, since we've spoken about this, how about I show you around Lagos tomorrow and give you a tour of Joshua Industries. Who knows, maybe one of these good days you will be responsible for the cyber security for Joshua Industries." He said, his smile filled his face. Maybe I owe Wale a little gift. Thanks to his little stunts, i might just go international faster than i imagined.

"I'd love that. Thank you." I'm not going to count my chickens before they hatch, but coming to Lagos might have just become more of a blessing than an annoyance.

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Unedited ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

I'm not sure what it is about Nigeria that's so invigorating and amazing. Oh wait, I do know. It's the five years contract I just signed with Joshua Industries. Yes, your girl bagged the contract much to the annoyance of poor Wale. I actually felt sorry for him when his father was digging into him. I was outside his office when their meeting was going on. Their conversation was heated, with a few english words here and there. Someone once told me that when a person shouts at you in their mother tongue them they must really be angry.

Wale walked out of his fathers office and saw me sitting there waiting for their meeting to end. He was fuming. His jaws were clenched and he was darker

than his usual shade. He walked up to me. I decided not to even acknowledge his presence. I sat there with my legs crossed with my iPad in my lap.

"You lousy bitch." He said between clenched teeth. Any other day I would be offended but seeing how angry he was made me laugh. He was so smug and full of himself when he made me that stupid offer and now he is like a spoilt little boy who got his toys taken away.

"Did you brush your teeth this morning? Theres a toothpaste I cam recommend, it really helps with, you know, all that." I said showing him his mouth.

"You think you're smart right? I'll show you what smart is." I got up and thanks to my heels I was face to face with him.

"If I were you I would be nice to me. You never know what could happen tomorrow. You might wake up tomorrow and find that I'm your new step mummy. And you know what step mummy's do with naughty

little boys like you, they send them very very far away." He chuckles and closes the gap between us. I can feel his hot breath on my face.

"Hell will freeze over before i let you get you evil hooks on my father." I chuckled and held on to his tie, pulling it a bit.

"Careful what you wish for." I whispered to him.

He clicked his tongue, pulled his tie and left.

"Please do it. Marry my dad, even if it's just to annoy my brother please do it." I look back and a young woman is standing there with the biggest smile on her face. You don't need Maury to know that she is a Joshua.

"Hi."

"Hello. I'm Kemi, Kemi Joshua. Were you serious about marrying my dad." I giggled and sat back down.

"No. I'm not marrying your father, I was just trying to piss off your brother." She took the seat next to me.

"Well you should do it more often."

"You dont seem very fond of your brother?"

"I love him. He is my flesh and blood. But when it comes to business he can be an idiot. I dont know how many fires my dad has had to put out because of him. He is supposed to retire in a year and he is busy training Wale to take over but as you can see, that's not going so well."

"How long have you worked here?"

"Fifteen years. I started working when I was fifteen, doing the most menial of jobs like making copies and tea and all that. By the time I graduated from university I knew the company inside and out. This place is my happy place." She looks around with a smile on her face.

I dont understand though. If she knows so much about the company why is Joshua senior even trying to train Wale? The man clearly has zero to no experience and yet his daughter has all the experience.

"So why dont you take over from your father? You know the company." She laughs and shakes her head.

"That's never going to happen. I'm a girl. And girls cannot carry their fathers legacy."

"Says who?" I asked shocked as hell that in the 21st century we still have people who think like this. I mean the Queen of England is carrying on her father's legacy.

"Patriarchy my sister." Mxm, I guess I should consider myself lucky. My dad is as open minded as they come. He has never been of the belief that women are lesser than men just because they gave balls dangling between their legs.

Joshua senior walks out of his office and Kemi and I stand up and face him.

"Ah Kemi, I see you've met our new Cyber security expert."

"Of course, I look forward to working with her." She

says with a smile on her face. I'm beginning to think her smile is more professional than genuine.

"Miss Majola, Kemi here knows the company like the back of her hand. Anything you need clarity on, she's the one to talk to." Okay so he knows all that and still thinks his idiot son will be the better option for his 'legacy'. Mxm. My little crush on him is dying a slow death.

"I look forward to working with you Kemi."

oooooooooooo.....oooooooooooo.....oooooooooooo.....

Finally I'm back home. And like a good traveler I bring home good tidings. Pinky is picking me up from the airport. After doing all the necessary check in's I walk out to the parking lot. I find Pinky already waiting for me. Her eyes sparkled when she saw me.

"Finally, you're back. You took longer than expected." She helped me put my bags in the boot of my car

that she was driving.

"Well I had some last minute business to take care off."

"What kind of business?" She asks as she closes the boot and gets in the car.

"We officially have Joshua Industries as a client." She screams so loud I see a few people in the parking lot stop and look our way. She closes her mouth and I could have sworn I saw tears in her eyes.

"Are you serious?" I nod my head with a smile on my face. Her enthusiasm is another reason i keep her close to me.

"Yep. Joshua senior gave me the contract, so we are going international."

"You did it. Your dream is coming true. We need to celebrate. I'm going to call Simphiwe and Thobile, we are going to the club tonight." She rambles on.

I cant even stop her cause once she gets an idea in

her head she's like a bulldozer, she's unstoppable. She starts the car and we drive to the office. It's a few minutes before knock off time but I do need to update my staff. They have kept the ship afloat so I need to update them. Pinky gathers everyone in the boardroom. By the time I walk in they are already mumbling. I can tell they are ready to go home and I'm just wasting their time.

"Ladies and gentlemen. Good afternoon. I know you're already tired and ready to go home, so I won't keep you long. I'm pretty sure you all noticed I wasn't here for the past week. I was actually out of the country, Nigeria to be precise. And I can confirm that T.N.M Technologies officially has Joshua Industries as a client."

"When you say Joshua Industries you mean the Joshua Industries, the billionaire from Nigeria Joshua Industries?" My CFO Yolanda asks.

"That one. He is officially on our books." There's clapping and whistling all around.

"So we are going international?" One of the interns asks.

"Yep."

"Does that mean we are getting raises?" Another one asks and the nods and rumblings from the others signals a support for that statement.

"Tell you what, Joshua Industries signed a five year deal, let's get through the first year with little to no hurdles and we'll talk about raises. How about that?"

"Can we hold you to that?" Pinky asks.

"Definitely. Twelve months from now, if everything goes the way it should, raises will be discussed. So let's go home for now and get some rest, and tomorrow we will strategize on how to deal with our new client. Have a safe journey home guys."

I walk out to my office with Pinky on my tail.

"Just so you know, I want a fifty percent raise. She says making me laugh. To be quite honest she does deserve it. But raises are off topic for now. We need

to celebrate.

Pinky and I drove to my place. She's been house sitting for me. Not that it was necessary since I live in an apartment building but if I have to leave for more than a day, I want to have someone in my place, someone I trust. When we got in Simz and Thobi confirmed that we'll meet at the club since their men are dropping them off. Pinky had to go back to her place so she can get an outfit.

I called the club and booked us a VIP section. Only after I'd hung up did I realise I called Makhosi's club. I hope to God he is not there tonight. Its midweek anyway so I cross fingers hoping he is held up somewhere. I get dressed.

I choose a black long sleeve, round neck dress with a cutout detail on the stomach and a split thigh. I seriously need to start dressing like a proper businesswoman and not an Instagram model. But

this is a club so *shrugs shoulders*. I get some nude stilettos and tie my hair in a ponytail. Its almost quarter past eight. I know those girls keep time. We said we'd meet at eight thirty and I'm pretty sure they are already on their way. If I dont leave now I'll get there late.

I get my phone and car keys and off I go. By the time I get to the club its already something to nine. I'm ten minutes late but I'm pretty sure Miss timekeeper Thobile is already watching the clock like a hawk watching its prey. I go to the bouncer and show him my booking. He ties a tag around my wrist and I walk in. A waiter is already waiting for me. She leads me up to the secluded section I booked. As much as I want to celebrate I'm in no mood for too many people.

The girl has on the shortest dress I've ever seen in my life. I'm pretty sure the designer intended for that to be a tshirt but moghel is using it as a dress.

Everytime she takes a step up I can almost see her ass. We get to the VIP section and its empty. I stand in the middle of the place looking around as if these girls will pop out from behind the couch and chairs, but no, they are not here.

I get my phone and call Pinky, she tells me she is running late but she'll be here soon. Thobi tells me she is waiting for her fiancee to come get her and Simz answers the phone while out of breath. I dont need google to tell me that she's having sex when she should be here. I immediately hang up. I order a bottle of wine and sit down. With my phone in hand I scroll through social media.

His scent makes his presence known before he can even say anything. The masculine scent mixed with alcohol and nicotine is overwhelming. I look up and find him staring at me with a frown on his face.

"Can I help you?" He smiles and sits down.

"Where is your boyfriend today?" I look behind me as

if I lost something.

"Damnit, I knew I was forgetting something. I forgot to carry him on my back. Damn." He laughs.

"Cute. Seriously though, I thought you didn't do relationships?"

"I don't."

"That's not what he said." I sigh and turn around to face him. I cross my legs. And since the split on my dress goes all the way up to the top of my thigh, when I cross my legs, the one on top is practically naked. His eyes go down to stare at my open thigh.

"Why is that so important to you Makhosi, you don't need to know what happens in my life." He looks up.

"I know that. But since you and I slept together while you are with someone, what does that say about you?" I smile and shake my head.

"You worry about things you shouldn't be worrying about Makhosi. You'll grow grey hair while young. Live a little."

He holds my thigh with his eyes not leaving mine. He parts my legs and his hand moves up and down the inside of my thighs.

"I don't know what it is about you Tivikele, I don't know why I feel so drawn to you. But I promise you this, one day.." his hand goes further up my thigh and his fingers touch my coochie. He pulls back and then he goes deeper again. I hold my breath as his fingers touch my clit. Dear God I know I should be stopping this but I so badly want to see how far he will go.

"One day, I will fuck the stubbornness out of you." He says his eyes looking at his hand. I take slow breaths as he pushes my underwear aside and feels the moist he created.

"You had a chance to do that, I guess you failed." I say looking at his bent down head. He immediately looks up. I feel his two fingers pinching my clit and pulling it a bit, I moan and try to close my eyes, but my pride wont let me lose this staring contest.

My legs are wide open, the only saving grace I have about this whole thing is that this place is dim, and I know they dont have cameras in the VIP section so I wont end up on social media as Makhosi's latest conquest.

"This is the stubbornness I'm talking about." He lets go of my clit and his finger goes straight inside me. He slowly moves his finger inside me and boy do I want to scream right now but I can't. This is wrong in so many different levels. My phone beeps. It's still in my hand so I look at it. It's a text from Thobi, she's here and so is Simz and Pinky. Damnit. I quickly push his hand out as my friends make their entrance. Thanks to the dimmed light I compose myself quickly.

"Why is it dark in here?" Thobi asks. Theres a switch just next to the entrance. She presses it and the room becomes light enough for us to see each other. Of course the girls are rather surprised to see

Makhosi here.

"Did we interrupt something?" Pinky asks. They are all looking at me. I'm praying so hard for my face to not betray me and turn red from embarrassment. Makhosi has a smug look on his face that I wish I could wipe off with a varaam slap. He picks up his drink and stands up.

"You didnt interrupt anything. I just thought I should keep your friend company while she waits for you." He says. I keep looking at him and his smile is plastered there for the world to see. He is like the cat that got the milk right now. My friends take their seats as the waiter takes their orders. Makhosi takes the finger that was deep inside me a minute ago and dips it in his drink, stirring the drink with it. He then brings the finger up to his mouth and sucks the living daylights out of it before sipping his drink. I know the man is crazy but who the fuck mixes alcohol with a womans juices? I hate myself for even finding this hot. I need to go to church and repent. Something must be wrong with me.

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I hate him. Yep I officially do. No its not because he did something bad to me, it's because he did something good and then failed, dismally to make me reach my peak. That's one thing I hate about men, ok maybe just him. He turns me on, wakes up all kinds of feelings in me and then when those feelings are ready to reach their peak he disappoints them.

That's one thing that's been occupying my head for the past couple of weeks, yes it's been that long. Even with the huge workload Joshua Industries came with, my stupid thoughts still find a way to gravitate towards that night. And in my thoughts, he finishes what he starts, but in reality he left me hanging. Yes I know my friends showed up that's why things had to end the way they did, but I still

blame him. He should have been a little faster.

Weekends are my favorite time of the week. I love my job but I also love unwinding, and weekends give me that. And now that my friends have men, I have to find a way to entertain myself, I'm very awkward when it comes to making new friends, that's why I've been stuck with the ones I have for forever now.

Today is Saturday, I saw on Twitter that Makhosi's club is hosting some international DJ today, DJ Remy, my favourite DJ of all time. A couple of years ago on my birthday, my friends and I flew to Ibiza to see him perform. That will forever be my highlight of life. Now he is right here, in my turf and I can't see him because I'm pretty sure Makhosi will be there. Even though I'd like to witness this event, I don't think I want to be running into him and have a repeat of last time.

I was chilling in the rooftop pool of this building,

that's another thing that made me fall in love with this place. The rooftop pool, of course there's another one downstairs that everyone uses, that one is always crowded, but this one, you'd be lucky if you found more than two people here. I've also realised it's mostly the people living in the penthouses who use this one. They tried to kick me out once, but I had to remind them that this is the new South Africa, that whole Europeans only bullshit ended in 94. Now they just let me be.

My phone rings while I'm sunbathing. I pick it up and a smile forms on my face. It's my favourite human being in the entire world, my mummy.

"Mummy." I answer.

"Klummy klummy, woknuka, you haven't called me in over a week. How do you think I'm doing?" I laugh cause one thing my mother will never fail to deliver, is drama. It's only been three days since we last spoke. We speak almost every day, but two days of no calls and she's ready to faint.

"I'm sorry my love, I've just been preoccupied with this new contract."

"So the contract is more important than me? Your mother. Tivikele I brought you into this world, difficult as it was because of you inherited your fathers big head." I roll my eyes and just smile. Dramatic as she is, she is my mummy and I love her dearly. And the difficult pregnancy thing is something she will never let me forget, as if I sent her to fuck her man. Mxm.

"Nothing will ever be more important than you my queen. You know my heart beats just for you." I can feel the smile she has on her face.

"Mxm, you're just saying that. So what are you up to?"

"Nothing much. Just sunbathing."

"Okay, did you hear, that dj you love will be there today. Did you buy your tickets?" She asks. My mother and I are as close as best friends. I tell her everything. That's how open we are with each other.

I sigh and sip on my drink.

"Nope. I can't go, Makhosi will be there."

"The one who has a little crush on you?"

"Yep." She laughs.

"So you're still not over whatever happened at the club?" I told you I tell her everything.

"Yes. I know it's lame but I need to get my bearings in order before I even get anywhere close to him." She laughs again.

"Oh my sweet baby, look at you catching feelings."

She teases.

"I'm not."

"Then why are you going to miss out on seeing this DJ?"

"Fine. I'll go."

"I didn't say you should. I was just asking."

"Ma, please, I'll catch the live stream on YouTube or Instagram."

"Mxm. So you'll miss out on a good time and seeing your favourite DJ just because usaba indoda (you're scared of a man.)"

"I'm not scared of him ma."

"Of course you're not. So how long before we can expect lobola?"

"Ma, bye bye." I hang up while the sound of her laugh rings in my ear.

Am I really afraid of seeing Makhosi? No I'm not. Yep, I am definitely not. I'm just avoiding drama. Right? You know what. There is only one way to end this. I got up from the lounger and went back to my apartment. DJ Remy will be performing around midnight. I have about nine hours before then. Plenty of time for me to get my power back.

I get in the shower and take a quick one. When I'm done i get dressed. Just a simple black mini skirt, a black sheer blouse with a scalloped trim lace lingerie

set underneath. Lingerie is a must in my world. In my mothers words, 'what if you get knocked over by a car and then when you get to the hospital the sexy doctor finds you with some huge granny panties.' Thanks to her, I buy lingerie sets like they are going out of fashion.

I put on my black heels and I'm ready to go. I leave my apartment and go down to the parking lot. I drive to his place. Good thing I still remember where he lives. I tell the security his name and unit number, they ask me my name, I'm tempted to tell them who I really am but where is the fun in that. Besides, if he is not home then I can go home with my dignity intact. But if he isn't home and he comes back to find I was looking for him then he'll think I'm obsessed with him, and then he will win. I can't have that.

"Grace, my name is Grace Khuzwayo, I'm his sister." I tell the guard. He dials an extension on their phone and he starts speaking. I can't hear what he is saying.

A few seconds later he hangs up and the gate swings open. Either he doesn't fear much or he is curious.

I park the car next to the parking with his unit number on it. I hope whoever owns this spot doesn't come back before I'm done with what I'm here for. I fix myself before walking up to the lift and going to the tenth floor. I get to his apartment and knock. I stand back a bit. I hear his voice coming closer to the door, he is talking to someone. I hope it's not a girlfriend. If he has one.

He freezes when he sees me standing there. I guess it was curiosity that made him allow the guards to let me in.

"I'll call you back." He says to his companion on the phone. His eyes dart down to my cleavage and I can feel my power coming back.

"Are you busy?" I ask.

"I'm never busy for you. So to what do I owe this pleasure?" He says leaning on the door with his hands in his pockets. He is wasting my time right now.

I walk past him and get into the apartment. It's the same as I remember it. Well I didn't get a good look at it that night but I did catch a few glimpses of it. I do remember that he had some naked woman piece of art over his fireplace. But now its gone. In its place is a huge portrait of someone peeking out of a lace curtain. It's beautiful.

"So, Miss Majola, who doesn't do relationships or dates. What are you doing here?" He is right behind me. And thanks to the carpet on the floor, his footsteps are muffled. I turn around and throw the bag on the couch.

"You need to finish what you started." He frowns.

"What did I start?" I unbutton my shirt and throw it on the couch too.

"You said you'd fuck the stubbornness out of me, so now is your chance."

"I'm sorry!" Either he is slow or he is just stupid. I unzip the skirt and it falls to the floor. Now I'm standing there with just my underwear and heels on.

"Finish what you started Makhosi. You said....."

"I know what I said. And that my dear is not the hill you want to die on." He says. But my mind is still stuck on that dear word. I find that word condescending and just rude. But for now I'll let it go. I walk closer to him. He is wearing shorts and a vest. I'm sure he wasnt planning on going anywhere for now.

I get close enough to him and put my hand on his balls. He groans as I slowly massage them.

"See, I wasnt asking for your opinion Makhosi, I was telling you what I want. You finish what you started, fuck the stubbornness out of me." I hold his neck

and bring it down for a kiss, but I don't kiss him. Instead I bite his ear. "If you can." I whisper to him. His breathing has changed. It's a bit shallow and urgent. My points seem to be going up with every touch.

I feel his hands cup my butt before he lifts me up to straddle him. I wrap my arms around his neck and kiss him. I can feel us moving, but I'm not sure where we are going. I feel something hard behind me, it moves and I notice he is taking me to his bedroom and he just opened the door with my back.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" He whispers. "I'm here aren't I?" With that he throws me on the bed and I literally bounce. He pulls off his tshirt and takes off his shorts. His dick is already standing at attention. He turns and walks to his closet. He comes back with a couple of ties. He gets on the bed and sits on my stomach with his knees resting on either side of me.

"So, if we are going to do this, we'll do it my way." He says.

"And what's your way?"

"This." He rolls the ties down. "The last time you were here, you were in control. Now I've noticed, you love being in control. But if I'm going to fuck the stubbornness out of you, I need to do this my way. So are you willing to let me control things?" He is serious. I'm not sure I like the idea of not calling the shorts, but once wont hurt right? I nod my head, he raises his eyes and I know he wants words.

"Yes. I'll let you have control. If you can handle it." He chuckles and wraps one tie around my wrist and then he wraps the other wrist. He pulls both hands up and ties them to the headboard. There is a little hook in the centre of the headboard. If you look at it you'd think it's a normal headboard, but it's not. Clearly it was made for some sinister activities.

He slides down and pulls my underwear down with him before he pulls my legs apart and ties them on

the corners of the bed leaving my entire vagina on full display. My heart starts racing. I fiddle with my hands trying to figure out if I can pull myself out of this knot he tied. Its firm, but I'm sure with a little tug here and there it would fall apart. That gives me a bit of comfort, cause if God forbid he leaves me here then I can untie myself and find my way home.

He goes to his closet and comes back with a shoe box. He leaves it on the bed between my open legs. My curiosity is on high alert right now. I need to know what is in that box. But he is clearly not going to tell me. He sits on the bed right next to me. He extends his arm across my torso and rests on it. He is looking at me with a smug look on his face.

"So, Tivikele Majola, I found you now."

"Actually you didnt find me, I came here willingly. So let's get on with it." He smiles and bends his head down to plant a kiss between my breasts. My nipples go on high alert immediately. They are craving for

attention but this man seemingly isn't ready to give it to them. He lifts his head up again and looks at me. What kind of misery is happening right now. He is the one who has been busy following me around and now I'm here and he is taking his sweet time. What if he can't get it up, that's why he is stalling? Oh my god I'm screwed. No pun intended.

"Your stubborn and impatient little self will have to wait a little. I want to know you." I need to take my L and leave. This is seriously not gonna work.

"If you can't do what I came here for then untie me so I can find someone who can do it." His face changes. From smug to borderline angry. Did I just bruise his ego, again?

"Fine." He gets up on the bed and kneels between my legs. He opens the shoebox and out comes a black dildo. He turns it on and it vibrates. He is not going to fuck me with a dildo. If I wanted one I would have just masturbated at home.

He runs the vibrating machine over my open folds and I squirm. He keeps going up and down and then he brings it back to vibrate on my clit. I squirm and moan. If this was his idea of fucking the stubbornness out of me then he is failing. Just when I feel my senses and muscles getting to nirvana he takes away the dildo. I close my eyes and breath in and out hoping he will do it again. I feel his breath on my face. I open my eyes and he is staring down at me with a grin on his face.

"You enjoyed that?" He asks. This is beginning to feel like a Q and A session. He reached down till he took my lips in his. He pulled them a bit and then let go. He looked at me. Even though my eyes were closed I could feel his stare on my skin. I slightly opened them and he took my lips and kissed the living daylights out of me. My hands were itching to touch his skin and feel his warmth but I couldnt. My breathing had taken a rhythm of it's own. One I didnt even know existed.

He let go of my lips and kissed my cheek, moving to my ear. He bit my ear lobe a bit and I moaned. He moved down my neck kissing and sucking till he got to my boobs. He unhooked the bra and let it fall on the sides. He swirled his tongue on my erect nipple while his hand cupped and squeezed my other boob. The fact that I couldnt even close my legs to ease the fire that was burning there made me more anxious. His other hand came up and both hands were now on my boobs. While they squeezed and my boobs his lips went down to my navel. I could feel him getting closer to my coochie and I was having tiny little spasms from the anticipation.

Finally he found his way to my displayed vagina. He let go of my boobs and opened my folds with both his hands. He swirled his tongue on my clit making me arch my back trying to ease the tension, but nothing helped. He was in full control. He took my clit into his mouth and sucked on it like he was giving me CPR. I felt his one finger make it's way inside me. I could tell I was dripping wet judging by

how easy it was for him to add another finger. His fingers were touching and prodding places in me only I could reach.

I felt my spasms getting more intense and urgent. My muscles contracted between his fingers driving me nuts. While I was busy trying to calm myself down and get my bearings back he stopped his sucking and fingering. I felt his dick hitting my clit a few times. I thought an orgasm was done but I was wrong. The more he hit me the more my muscles woke up and made their presence known. Every nerve in my body seemed to have congregated in my clit. I released and I felt pee like liquid spilling out of me like a waterfall. My body was vibrating like I was having a seizure. He didn't stop punishing my clit and my body didn't stop releasing its juices all over him. When I looked up his entire front body was covered in liquid. Even his beard had some liquid stuck on it.

While I was busy pondering all that his dick made it's way inside me so quick and lethal I swear it greeted my womb first. He gave me a couple of slow precise strokes then he stopped. He was kneeling on the bed with my butt sitting on his thighs. I dont know when he untied the ties on legs, he reached up and untied my hands too. Thank God. Now I could touch him. He was looking into my eyes, lust was written all over his face. I wanted him to continue his strokes. Instead he pulled out and walked away.

"Makhosi." I called out with a hoarse voice. He turned back and looked at me. "Where are you going, we are not done yet." He smiled and went to the bathroom. In just a few seconds I heard the shower running. Dear God he cant do this to me again. I got off the bed and fell over. I hit my head on something. I closed my eyes trying to process the pain. When I opened my eyes it was dark. I turned on the light and I was back in my place. What the fuck? Did I just have a wet dream? I looked up at the bed and the sheets being wrinkled confirmed everything. I looked

down at my pyjama pants and they were wet. I could still feel my throbbing clit. Damnit. I cant believe he still trolls me even in my dreams and even in lala land he still denies me a good orgasm. What kind of witchcraft is this?

THE PLAYERS GUIDE

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Unedited ♡ ♡ ♡ ♡

'Sathane suka endleleni

Awuboni siyathandaza

Awuboni siyathandaza

Awuboni siyathandaza

Sathane suka endleleni

Awuboni siyathandaza

Awuboni siyathandaza'

The sounds of Amadodana AseWesile reverberate inside the car. This has been my morning jam since I had that nightmare with Makhosi in it. This is my prayer for whatever witchcraft he has used on me to depart and never return. I can't be having wet dreams. Never. He is the one who should be having these dreams. Not me. The crazy part about it is that DJ Remy got mixed up in this whole mess, unknowingly so. And now I can't even stream any of his music cause I go back to that moment of denial.

If Makhosi was from Limpopo I swear I would be in Cape Town right now immersed in the sea water to get rid of whatever voodoo this man has put on me, I've heard Limpopo witchcraft is on another level. I've never believed that though. Mostly because when I was in varsity a few years ago i had a boyfriend from Venda. I can confirm now, men from Limpopo are gifted in the ding dong department. Yes I dated one but he was a perfect representation for the province. He should be given a presidential medal for being a loyal and patriotic Limpopian. Is there even such a thing? Either way, if he hadn't gone to London to further his studies I'd probably let him bury himself deep inside me just so I can forget about Makhosi.

Makhosi is Zulu though, and Zulu witchcraft is also up there. I know people dont talk much about it but the fact that there are places like kaMhlab'uyalingana should be proof enough. So I wouldn't be surprised if he consulted someone from there. I've never been one to compare dicks though, for me, as long as the carrier of said dick knows how

to use it then I'm good. I mean there are people with teaspoon dicks who make magic, then there are the those with bazookas who cant even empty two rounds.

Look at me talking about dicks when I should be praying. This is why God is allowing Makhosi to bewitch me. How does a sane person even disrespect God by thinking about dicks. I seriously need redemption. I shake my head trying to get all the screws back in their places. The robot has been green for a while now so I expect the guy or girl in front to go. But as soon as the robot turns orange they slow down suddenly. Unfortunately for me I noticed too late. By the time I bring my car to a sudden halt it's already kissed the other cars ass. Now the alarms are going off. Good thing it wasnt too much of a bang that my airbag went off.

I switch the engine off just as the person in front opens their car door to inspect the damage he has

done. Now I know it's a he because of his long legs making contact with the gravel. He has on brown lace formal shoes, black socks and what looks like formal pants. He gets out of the car and walks towards the back of it. Now that he is fully out I can see him clearly. He is wearing a suit with slim fit pants, white shirt, a black blazer. I swear God was showing off when he made this man.

I've been stuck on my seat since he got out of his car. I should be out there helping him inspect and exchanging insurance details but I'm here. Mesmerized by him. He walks towards my window and knocks on it. The other cars have stopped and are now watching us. I roll down the window and he leans on it looking at me. I'm even afraid to look at him.

"Are you okay?" He asks with a bit of a British accent. I turn to look at him and his eyes, Lord Jesus take me now. No wait, dont take me just yet. I need to

know this man. I clear my throat.

"I should be asking you that, I'm the one who hit you." He smiles. Forget Jesus, God take me now. Okay give me a minute.

"Dont worry about it. It's just a minor scratch." He says revealing his pearly whites. Someone told me once that in order to get over a man, you need to get under another one. And I think this one will be a perfect distraction to get Makhosi out of my head.

"I would feel much better if you let me pay for the scratch to be fixed." He laughs.

"Tell you what. How about you take me out to dinner and we will consider that payment enough." I chuckle.

"Okay." He takes out his phone out and hands it to me.

"Give me your number and I'll make sure to call you." I take the phone and punch in my numbers. I save them as T.N. Majola and hand back the phone.

"Okay then. I'll come and collect my payment. Tonight." He says and walks away. He gets into his Audi A7 and drives off.

I'm still stuck there when the other cars behind me honk their horns. I start the car and drive to the office. I park and get off to see if my car has any damage, there is none. Maybe he was right about the scratch. One less thing to worry about. I get my things and head on inside. I find Pinky already waiting for me with my coffee in her hand. She hands it to me as we walk to my office.

"There's someone in the office to see you." She tells me. She looks a bit nervous and excited all at the same time.

"What's wrong with you? And who is in the office?" She smiles and stops me a few feet away from the office.

"Have you ever seen a god?" She whispers. I squint my eyes and frown.

"What are you talking about?" I whisper back. She gently drags me away from the office door.

"There is a man in your office. I swear to you he was molded and dipped in perfect dark chocolate." Okay, it must be raining men today. I want to laugh at her but at the same time I'm kind of happy she's found a new crush. Atleast now she won't be crushing on my brother.

"Okay then Miss Pinky, let me go see this chocolate dipped men you're talking about." She's five to screaming with excitement. Now I'm curious about this man. I walk in and its him. He is sitting in my office. How did he even know I work here? Did he even come for me or work? I hope it's me cause if it's for work then he will be off limits to whatever I want to do to him. First rule of business. Never mix business with pleasure.

"Hi." He turns around and shoves his phone in his pocket. As soon as he sees me his smile widens.

"Hi. What are you doing here?" Shouldn't that be my question?

"You need to stop taking my lines." He chuckles and I can feel his eyes on me as I walk around to sit down. He takes a seat too.

"So you're the famous Miss Majola?" He says. I don't know about famous though.

"I'm sorry, I didn't get your name earlier." He gets up and gives me his hand to shake.

"Alex, Alex Joshua." I shake his hand and he sits back down.

"Joshua as in Joshua Industries?" I ask.

"Yes. My uncle is Joshua senior." He says. Does everyone really call him Joshua senior. I thought that was just our own inside joke with Mabutho.

"Okay then. Nice to meet you. Tivikele Majola."

"It's a pleasure to finally put a face to the name. My uncle can't stop singing your praises."

"Really. Why? I haven't done much for Joshua Industries."

"I think it's more to do with not letting Wale bully you. He has that bad habit. Most people buckle and give in to what he wants, but not you Miss Majola. That is impressive in my uncles eyes."

"Well I try. So to what do I owe the pleasure of this visit?" I know we didnt have an appointment.

"Well, my uncle sent me here to overlook the work you're doing with Joshua Industries." Ok so he thinks I need a babysitter? These Joshua men are full of themselves.

"I know my job Mr Joshua, I dont need a babysitter." He chuckles.

"I know. But my uncle is a little untrusting when it comes to his business. But I promise you I will make sure to stay out of your hair. I've done my research and I know you're quite capable. I'm just here for my uncles peace of mind. Other than that I will be staying out of your way."

"I hope so. Is that all?" My mood has gone from a hundred to zero in less than two minutes.

"I hope I didnt offend you Miss Majola." He says standing up.

"Not even. It was nice meeting you." I stand up and shake his hand before opening the door for him. He smiles and walks out. I take my phone and call Joshua senior's office. "Hi, Miss Majola for Mr Joshua senior..... thank you, I'll hold." His secretary puts me through to him.

"Miss Majola."

"I dont need a babysitter Mr Joshua. If you can't trust me with your contract you are more than welcome to terminate it. Of course that termination fee will be welcomed. But I wont work with someone looking over my shoulder."

"I take it you've met my nephew."

"I have. Now are we canceling the contract or not?"

He sighs.

"My apologies Miss Majola. Maybe sending my nephew there was a bit premature. I'll have him home as soon as possible."

"Good. I'd like to think you knew exactly what you were doing when you gave me that contract. And if you've changed your mind you are more than welcome to terminate it. This is not how I work."

"Again, I apologize. Please accept my apology."

"I'll keep in touch Mr Joshua." I hang up and click my tongue. Patriarchy is a bitch.

Usually when I am pissed off I bury myself in work. And that's what I've been doing today. Burying myself in work. I don't know who Joshua senior thinks he is but if he thinks he will bully me then he has another thing coming. I finished up working and got my things ready to go home. I need food before I go so I'll probably go past Woolies to get their ready to cook foods.

I get in my car and drive to the mall. I get to the mall and head straight to Woolies. I get what I need and go to pay. While standing in line I see Makhosi in the front of the line. He smiles at me and I smile back. He winks at me. I cant wink to save my life so I just smile. While I'm busy on my phone I feel someone standing next to me. I look up and it's Alex.

"Miss Majola."

"Mr Joshua."

"I'd like to apologize for earlier. If I'd known my uncle didnt speak to you about this I wouldnt have come here." He says sounding genuine. But then again he is a man, they are all liars.

"Its okay. Your uncle and I spoke and we sorted everything out." He sighs and takes a deep breath.

"I know. He told me. You're one feisty woman Miss Majola." I smile and look up. My eyes land on Makhosi who is staring at me with his jaws clenched. Why the fuck is he angry, I'm not his girlfriend.

The cashier says 'next' and Makhosi leaves. He pays for his things and leaves. I don't know why I feel bad but i do. I told you the man was bewitching me. I say my goodbyes to Alex and pay when my turn comes. I pack everything in my car and drive out of the mall. For some strange reason I end up driving to Makhosi's club. It's still early for the party crowd but there are people already there.

I park and go in. I see a waitress passing by and I stop her.

"Hi, do you know if Makhosi is here?" She stands there with her arms crossed looking at me from head to toe. Her attitude tells me one thing, she's shared a bed with Makhosi, no doubt about that.

"He is in ths office." She walks away. Cute as she is she needs customer service lessons. I go up to the back of the club where the office is. I knock and walk in. I find him sitting on top of his desk facing the wall.

"Nice view." He turns around quickly. I guess he

didn't hear me knock.

"What are you doing here?" He asks and takes a seat.

"Nice office you have here."

"I asked you a question?"

"Why do you always get angry when you see me with a man?"

"I don't."

"You could have fooled me." I walk around the desk and sit on top of it with my legs dangling right next to him. "You got angry when you saw me with Andile, and now you just got angry cause you saw me with another guy. Why?"

"The world doesn't revolve around you Tivikele." I shift the documents in front of him and drag myself so I'm sitting right in front of him.

"You're right. The world doesn't revolve around me, but the way you're carrying on one would think your world revolves around me. I dont understand why because you have a pick at the most gorgeous

women who pull up here every night. So why the jealousy?" He chuckles and stands up. Instead of letting him go I pull him close to me and lock my legs around his waist. I can feel his dick right on top of my vagina.

"I dont know who lied to you." I unbuckle his pants looking at him straight in the eyes.

"I dont do relationships Makhosi, I dont do love or dates. I told you that." I fill my hand with his now hard manhood. "The only thing I can offer you is sex. That's it. I'm sorry if that's not what you want but that's all I have to offer. Getting into a relationship with you would be cruel, not just to you but to the both of us."

"Why? What's wrong with me? Didn't the other guy say he was your boyfriend?"

"He is not my boyfriend. He is a friend. With benefits."

"How many of those do you have?"

"Just two. Well its about to be one now cause the other one is catching feelings."

"You sound like a man."

"What's wrong with that?"

I feel his hand go down to my coochie. He moves my underwear aside and rubs my clit.

"You're not a man Tivikele, you're a woman." I've heard that line so many times. I don't need to be reminded of it. I push him off me and he sits back down in his chair. I lift my skirt up and sit on him. Grinding myself on his erect dick.

"Do you have a condom."

"Top drawer." I open the drawer and find the box of condoms. This is another reason why things wouldn't work between us. He is too much of a player. He might be in denial now but he is. I take one condom, open it and slide it down on him.

"I know who I am Makhosi." I say as I push myself

down on him and start moving. "I know what I want, I know what I need. And a relationship is not in my cards right now. This however I can give you. And that's where my offer ends." He holds my waist down and stops me from moving.

"I dont think I'll ever be able to accept that offer. I want you, not just for one night but for the rest of my life. But if I can't have you then it's fine." He pulls out and turns me around to face the desk. He pushes my upper body down so its resting on the desk. He parts my legs and lifts my skirt over my ass. He pulls down my underwear. Next thing I feel is his tongue circling around my clit. He buries his head in my coochie sucking up all the juices flowing out of me. I feel my body ready to give up and release. He stops and gets up. He enters me from behind.

I feel his hand on my neck. His strokes are slow and lethal. His hand on my neck choking the hell out of me. I just hope the sound of the music is loud enough that no one can hear us. He leans over my body and whispers in my ear.

"I don't know when, I don't know how, but one day you will be Mrs Khuzwayo." He gets up again and starts going in deeper and faster. He pumps into me so hard I could swear I just felt my womb move sideways. He lifts my leg and places it on the desk before he goes deeper than Bushiri has ever gone with his prophecies.

My body finally gives in after holding on for a while. I feel my juices drip down my leg as he reaches his climax too. We stay like that for a while then he pulls out. More of my cum drips down my leg. He gets some wipes from his desk and starts wiping me all the way down from my leg all the way up to my exposed vagina. I stand up and he helps me pull down my skirt. I turn around to look at him.

"I have to go." He holds my face and kisses me like his life depends on it.

"One day Mrs Khuzwayo. One day." He whispers in my mouth. I grab my bag and walk out. I don't know

what just happened. I get home and get under the shower. I stand there for almost an hour but I cant get rid of his scent on me. But how am I supposed to do that when he just cemented himself deep inside of me. I told you there's some witchcraft at play here.

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I cant stop thinking about last night. About her. Well I haven't stopped thinking about her since the first time I laid eyes on her. But last night was different. It felt like a confirmation of something. I'm not sure what yet but it was something.

I woke up earlier than I usually do today. Maybe its excitement I dont know. I helped milk the cows before going back to the house for breakfast. When I got there my family was already waiting. Mum and dad were in their usual seats, my siblings were also here, except Sphetho who had to rush somewhere. No one knows where he goes every day early in the morning. I need to check that out. I dont want him hanging with the wrong crowd like he used to.

I sat down and my mum said grace. We ate our food in silence. Well I was silent everyone else was talking.

"So what's her name?" I heard someone ask. I was so engrossed in my own day dreams I didn't even hear who it was. I decided to ignore them.

"Makhosi your mother is talking to you." My dad's voice filled the room. I looked up and stared at him then turned to mum.

"I'm sorry what?"

"I asked what's her name?" Mum answered.

"Whose name?"

"The girl that's making you smile and hum songs early in the morning." I smiled looking at the grin on her face. She's been asking me since I turned thirty when I'm getting married. It's crazy how parents can go from 'don't have sex and bring babies in my house' to 'when are you getting married? I'm ready for grandkids.'

"I don't know what you mean ma."

"Okay. Keep playing dumb." She says and goes back to her food. I love her but I'm not about to give her false hope.

"I know who she is?" Ayanda chirps in. This one thinks she knows everything. I look at her and she has a smug look on her face like she really does know what she's talking about.

"Really? Who is she?" The mamgobhozi that's my mother asks.

"I dont know her name yet, but her number is saved on his phone as Mrs Khuzwayo with a heart next to it." She answers. And she's looking at me to deny it so she can bring more files. I need to lock my phone from now on. I decide to not give her the satisfaction.

I get up and put my plate in the sink and walk back out. I have work to do. I get the van and the workers load the milk that needs to be delivered today. While I'm waiting for them to finish up I decide to go to Instagram. Her profile to be exact. I find her latest

photo that she posted less than an hour ago. She's in her formal clothes. I find another picture of her smiling with her eyes closed. Whoever took that picture caught her off guard.

His smile is as captivating as her frown. I don't know why God sent her my way. If he did send her. She's so stubborn and beautiful. Sometimes I wonder if I'll ever live up to being the man who can tear those walls she's built around her heart down. I screenshot the pic and save it on my phone.

As soon as I get the go ahead I start the car. Mthokozisi, my brother joins me since Sphetho abandoned his duties.

"So what's her name really?" He asks as we drive out of the farm.

"Who?"

"The girl you keep daydreaming about. She must be something special." I smile to myself and look out

ths window. She is special alright.

We make our deliveries. When we get to the last place, a restaurant run by an ex, Mthokozisi decides to go buy food from across the street. I unload the milk with the help of a waiter. My ex Precious walks up to me wearing the skinniest dress she puld fit into.

"Qwabe. I do believe I owe you." She says seductively. "Come to the office, I'll process your payment." She turns and walks away. I follow her. Shes swaying her hips and ass from side to side giving me an erection.

We get to Hey office and she does the eft. Good thing its fast because my phone beeps indicating that the payment is in. She comes around the desk after printing ths proof of payment and stands in front of me.

"You've been scarce lately." She says.

"Work. You know how it is."

"Well, I missed you." She's already running her hands down my chest all the way down to my dick. She cups my dick in her hand. I know we've done this for a while now but I can't help feeling like I shouldn't be doing this.

She untied the knot I tied around my waist using my overall sleeves. She pulls the overall down together with my boxers. She holds my dick in her hand and gives me a hand job. When she tries to put my dick in her mouth I stop her and pull her back up.

"We can't do this." She chuckles and tries to hold my dick again but I push her hand away. "Seriously, we can't."

"Why? She asks with a furrowed brow. "We've always done this."

"I know. But not anymore. I have to go." I pull up my pants and walk out.

I get to the parking and find Mthokozisi in the car

eating.

"That was quick."

"What?"

"That. You usually take longer to 'deliver' here, so what gives?"

"Nothing. Listen I need a favour. I need you to drop me off somewhere then drive to Kwamaimai and take the meat orders for friday. Can you do that?"

"Sure."

I start the car and drive to T.N.M Technologies. I get off the car and Mthokozisi gets on the driver's side.

"I'll be done in thirty minutes." He nods and drives off. I walk into the building. There is no one at reception. Perfect. I walk to Tivikele's office. I find her sitting on her desk buried in work.

"Sitting that close to the computer will damage your eyes." She looks up and I can tell she is surprised to

see me. Well if she hadn't blocked me I would have called first.

"What are you doing here?" I close the door and lock it behind me. I slowly walk towards her.

"I came to see you. I needed confirmation that last night wasn't a dream." She smiles and swings her chair around to face me. She crosses her legs and the slit on her skirt opens up to show her thigh.

"What kind of confirmation are you looking for?" I swear this girl has been sent to drive me nuts. I get down on my knees and part her legs. I thought she'd protest but she doesn't. I pull her close to me and kiss her. She cups my face in her hands before she wraps her arms around my waist. She pulls away after a while and stares straight into the depths of my soul. "Is this good enough for you?"

"No." I answer and kiss her again. I lift her butt off the chair and push the skirt up then come down with her thong.

I recline the chair and pull her close. I lift her legs up and put them on my shoulders. Her coochie is right in my face. I run my tongue on her exposed clit and she moans. I swirl my tongue on her clit. This doesn't feel like a dream. I move my tongue down to her folds and open them up before sticking my tongue in her hole. Her moans are getting louder with each passing moment.

I feel her body about to give in and I stop. I remove her legs from my shoulder and wrap them around my waist. I lift her up and walk to the wall. I pin her there with her grinding on me. I untie my overalls and let them fall to the ground after taking out the condom. I rip it and slide it in. I enter her and her warm moist haven welcomes me like I belong there.

I move myself in circles inside her. Her nails are digging into my shoulder with pleasure. I start stroking her harder and harder. Her moans fill the room, sounding like music to me. I carry her to the

couch and lay down with me still buried inside her. I lift her leg up to her shoulder and pump into her over and over again.

I feel her ready to let go but she is still holding it in. "Let it go baby. Let it go." I silence her screams with a kiss as her body finally reaches its peak. I keep going till I feel my own peak take over. I pull out and stare at her face with her eyes closed trying to catch her breath. "I guess I wasnt dreaming after all." She smiles with her eyes closed.

"I guess not. There are wipes in my bag."

I get up and find the wipes in her bag. I wipe her clean and throw everything including the condom in the trash. I see her thong on the floor and I pick it up.

"Did you see my underwear?" She asks while pulling down her skirt and looking around the office. I lift it up so she can see it.

"This one?" Ahs gets up and walks towards me.

"Yes, please." I put it in my pocket and I can see shock written on her face. "Can I have it back."

"No. This will be a reminder that lady night and tonight wasn't a dream. Have a good day Miss Majola." I kiss her on the lips and walk out.

When I get out Mthokozisi is already waiting for me. I get on the passenger side.

"You smell like sex."

"Last time I checked you were a virgin, so how would you know how what sex smells like." He opens the window.

"Keep telling yourself that. But I guess now there is one more clue to the mystery girl. She works at T.N.M Technologies. Now to find her name." He says trying to provoke me. Today is not the day though, I'm too high up in the clouds to let him bring me down.

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TIVIKELE

I don't catch feelings, I dont love, I don't date. My heart is off limits, to anything and everything.

I've been singing that song in my head since I started the drive home four hours ago. All I need right now is my mums famous chicken soup and my dads warm hugs. I drive into Winston Park just as the clock is about to hit 8pm. I hope one of my parents will be home. They work too hard.

I use my gate remote and drive into the driveway. My dads car is parked outside the garage so I know he is home, and he'll probably be leaving soon. The joys of being the best cardiologist in the country. I walk into the house and find him watching the weather forecast. His blazer is in his arm and I know he is on

his way out.

"Macingwane." He turns around and pulls down his glasses. He smiles. I missed him. He opens his arms and I go in for a hug. I wrap my arms around him and lay my head on his chest.

"Why didnt you tell me you were coming?"

"Surprise."

"You know I hate surprises. What if you'd found me and your mum making a little brother or sister for you?" I pull away and he chuckles.

"Eeuw. Too much information Baba. You are going to the hospital?"

"Yep, I have a surgery to prep for. You look tired, what's wrong? And dont tell me it's the drive."

"We'll talk when you get back. Where is your wife?"

"She's at the hospital. She'll be helping me with the surgery."

"Okay. We'll talk later then."

"Are you sure you're okay?" I smile and hug him again.

"I'm okay, I promise. Tell mum I love her." I feel him kiss me on the top of my head.

"Okay. Lock the doors. How long will you be here anyways?"

"A couple of days, maybe more. I dont know yet."

"Whatever you're running from must be big. I'll see you later." He walks out.

I throw myself on the couch and heaved a sigh of relief. I need to speak to my mother. I might be a daddy's girl but my mum and I are best friends. And right now I need her to tell me that I'm not going crazy. Cause it feels like I am. I keep thinking about this afternoon and last night. Hopefully being far away from him will give me some much needed perspective so I can get over whatever it is that's going on between us. Work will just have to keep me busy.

THE PLAYERS GUIDE

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Unedited ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

"Wakey wakey sunshine." My mom says when she gets in my room. I turn the other side and continue with my sleep but this drama queen wont let me rest. She starts kissing me all over my face making me giggle.

"Okay, I'm up." I open my eyes and stare at her. She's looking at me with a smile on her face. "Hi mummy."

"Hi baby. You didnt tell me you were coming."

"Surprise!" She laughs. I missed her. I know we talk a lot on the phone but still, I missed her.

"Come on, let's go make breakfast."

"Shouldnt you be sleeping. You're still in your scrubs." She pulls me up from the bed.

"I have the next two days off so I'll sleep. Let's go."

I get off the bed and follow her to the kitchen. We start on breakfast.

"So, will you tell me what's going on?"

"Mhmm."

"Don't mhmm me, you never show up here without calling first. What happened?" I sigh and sit down.

"Makhosi happened." A grin forms on her face. This one thinks she'll be hearing wedding bells soon.

"And?"

"I dont know. He seems to think we are about to be in a relationship."

"What's wrong with that? He is a good looking man, successful, what more could you ask for?"

"Maybe someone who doesnt see me as a challenge he needs to overcome."

"I don't understand."

"Ma, I am hardheaded at most. I do what I want, when I want and however I want. I don't take kindly to being ordered around, especially by men, that's why I started my company cause the idea of being on some 'no sir, yes sir' day in and day out just didn't sit right with me."

"That's good and all but where does Makhosi enter into that?"

"Makhosi and I are the same person in different bodies. He speaks and people listen. Girls fall at his feet, well the money does help trip them over but still, he gets any and every girl he wants. I don't want to be one of his latest conquests."

"Its a little too late for that dont you think. You've already been in his bed once before."

"Three times." Her mouth falls to the floor. She pulls the chair across from me and sits down.

"Wena, why are you keeping secrets from me?" I chuckle. My mother is not only dramatic but she loves gossip too. One thing I'll always be grateful to

her for is her open mindedness. One thing she's never failed to do was create a safe space for us to talk to her about anything and everything as her daughters. I was never the kid who looked to books and porn to learn about sex, my mother made sure of that. To this day I still come to her for anything and everything. And she's not judgemental which makes it easier for me to explore what I like and don't like when it comes to my sexuality.

"Ma, it wasn't a secret. It happened two days ago."

"Okay, and when else did it happen. You said three times."

"Yesterday afternoon in the office. Well technically speaking both times were in an office. First his and then mine." She has her mouth wide open in shock.

"So that's why you ran home. You are running from your feelings?"

"Not really. Don't get me wrong the sex is great but I just feel like we are moving a bit too quick. He wants a relationship and I don't think I can give him that."

"Then tell him. Nothing beats communication."

"I have. And he doesn't seem to get it. He is so used to getting what he wants I feel like me rejecting him makes him want to pursue me even more."

"I guess you have a point. Men are chasers by nature. And if they get rejected some take that as a 'try harder'. Be firm about it. I don't want you being with a man who feels like he has to break you down and mould you into being the kind of woman he wants you to be. You're strong and independent, any man who wants to be with you will have to add to that strength and not tone it down. If Makhosi is not the one, you're still young, I'm sure a man worthy of your time and presence is out there somewhere looking for you."

"Thanks mummy."

"Let's set the table. Your dad should be home soon with your sister."

We set the table and a few minutes later my dad walks in with my little sister Gcinile. When she sees

me she quickly runs to me but my dad beats her to it. He gives me a hug making her roll her eyes. Mum and I just laugh.

"Really! You're too old to be doing that." She says with her arms crossed on her chest looking at dad.

"Too old to hug and greet my daughter?"

"Mxm." She comes and forces her way between me and my dad till my dad let's go of me. "Hey sis, ungphatseleni (what did you bring me?)" She asks in Siswati. I know she's trying to piss my dad off. Our mum is Swati and dad is Zulu. We might be Nguni but if it were up to dad we'd speak Zulu only.

"Mxm." He says and walks to the kitchen.

"I didn't bring you anything, I sent you money last week. Where is it?"

"Eh, I'm a medical student, we are going through the most right now so please send as much money and gifts as you can. Dont ask me what happened to the last gift you sent. It's gone." I know medicine is hard

but this one never fails to remind us that she's the only one who followed in the parents footsteps.

"Hhayke medical student, you'll have to wait till month end."

"Mxm." She lets go of me and sits down. What are you doing here anyway?"

"I'm home. What do you mean?"

My dad comes back and we sit down to have breakfast.

"Now that you're both here," mum starts. "Your uncle is expecting you for the reed dance next month." Gcinile and I look at each other and concentrate on our food. "You can pretend all you want but I know you heard me." She says.

We've been attending the reed dance in Eswatini since we were kids. My uncles are always more than happy to host us. The past few years I've been able to dodge the whole event because of work. And this

year Joshua Industries just came to my rescue.

"I would love to but I can't. I just got a huge contract and it needs my attention." I say.

"You'll have to make time ke sisi, your cousin Seluliwe is getting engaged to the prince, they will be announcing the engagement at the reed dance. So you need to be there to support her." Shoot, there goes my excuse.

"Fine. I'll go." Mum smiles and we all turn to look at Gcinile. She looks around the table and realizes she has no choice really.

"This is emotional blackmail but fine, I will go."

We finished breakfast and the parents went to rest. Gcinile went to school so now I'm left all by myself. I fired up my laptop and got some work done. It's already the weekend anyway so I might as well leave here on Sunday. I texted Andile and told him I was in town. And now he is coming to pick me up.

I took a quick shower since I've been in my pj's since morning. I didn't bring any clothes cause I left Joburg like a thief in the night. I tiptoed to my parents room. And lucky for me it wasn't locked. I went to mums closet and got myself a dress. Just when I was about to walk out my dad woke up.

"Yeah sgebengu." I stopped and turned around. Mum was still asleep. I went to dads side of the bed.

"Shhhh."

"What are you doing in our room?"

"I just needed a dress."

"Just so you know if your mother catches you I will deny ever knowing about your thievery." I smiled and kissed him on the cheek.

"I know. I have to go meet a friend. I won't be long." I walked out. I put on the dress. Five minutes later Andile was outside.

We drove to the mall and got some takeaways then

we drove to the North Pier and sat there watching the boats come into the harbor.

"So what brings you this side?"

"I needed some fresh air. What have you been up to?"

"This and that." My phone rings and it's an unsaved number. My instinct when I see an unsaved number is someone calling me about work. I pick it up and the sounds of Tory Lanez and Chris Brown singing the Take are the greeting I get.

'I wanna put you in seven positions for 70 minutes, you get it, babe

You got a lot on your mind

And I wanna ease it up and lick it and slip it in

You doin' light scream on that ice cream when I scoop it and dip it in

Unzippin' the tight jeans and that feminine hygiene is magnificent

Tryna show you, girl, I'm different
I get to lickin', and stickin', and lickin', and stickin' it
'Til the pussy get too wet and it's drippin'
And splittin' both them legs like dividends
If it ends up how I want it
Then you'll end up sittin' all over my bottom lip, baby
The feelin' of fuckin' you, feelings all up in you
Make it hard for you to bottle 'em, baby
This dick is too big just to swallow it, baby
But still you do it like it's Thanksgiving
And you gobblin', gobblin', gobblin', gobblin', baby
Like what's a goon to a goblin, baby?
That pussy hotter than the summer June in
Metropolis, baby
No hiding it, baby
She know what it is when I come around

Let me take you down'

I dont need Mulimisi to tell me who that was. Now I need to block him again.

"Who was that?" Andile asks while picking up the empty takeaways.

"No one important. Wanna have some fun?"

"Let's go." We race to the car and he drives to his place.

As soon as he stops the car I get out and walk around to sit on the bonnet.

"Are we not going inside?" He asks.

"Come here." He walks over to me till he is standing between my legs. I take his hand and place it on my vagina. "Do you still want to go inside?" He smiles and kisses the daylights out of me.

He pulls down my underwear and before I know it his

head is buried deep in my cookie jar. I lay down on the bonnet giving him full access to my warm moisturized haven. Good thing he lives alone because if there was anyone in the house they would be out to see what's going on by now. He holds my clit in between his teeth and pulls a bit then sucks. He repeats the process a few more times and I can feel my body ready to give in. He sticks his tongue inside me and like the final nail to a coffin I buckle and squirm as an orgasm hits.

"What the....." someone says then stops. I look up only to find Bab'Khumalo frozen in one spot with his mouth wide open. I quickly close my legs locking Andile in.

"Baba!" Andile shoots his head up and looks at me. He follows my gaze and freezes when he sees his father behind him. Bab'Khumalo finds his feet and they lead him back inside.

Andile is laughing his lungs out.

"What's so funny?" I ask while pulling down my dress.

"Nothing, let's go inside." Is he nuts?

"Like hell I am. Take me home."

"Why?"

"Andile. Are you for real right now? Your father, who happens to be one of my biggest clients just saw me with my legs spread on the bonnet of a car like a prostitute and you want me to go in there and act like nothing just happened? Uyahlanya wena (you are crazy.) Take me home." I get off the bonnet and get in the car. Andile thinks this is funny. Mxm. How will I ever look at that man again? Yoh.

THE PLAYERS GUIDE

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Unedited ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

Guilt is one messed up thing. I didnt do anything wrong. People have sex all the time, it's normal. There is absolutely nothing wrong with what we did. Right? Yeah, we did nothing wrong!

I fell asleep as soon as I got home. My parents were busy cooking and I had to pretend to be tired. I don't know why I felt bad cause they dont know anything. I stayed in bed for a while before deciding to join everyone for breakfast. We had our breakfast and then helped mum prepare for lunch. It's a Saturday and the family is chilled. Although it's a bit cold the braai stand outside is roaring with hot coals ready to roast some meat. My brother Mabutho is also coming, I'm not sure about Bahole though.

I helped mum make the salads and pap in the kitchen. When we were done we set the table. And only then did Gcinile show up.

"You're late." I say as soon as she walks in.

"I brought wine." She lifts the plastic bag and the bottles clink together making noise. Mabutho follows behind her.

"Family." He gives mum a hug then moves to me before heading out to the backyard.

Mabutho and my dad came back in with the meat and we sat down to have lunch. While we were busy laughing and joking around the door opens and Bahole storms in. Whatever excitement I had to see him vanishes when I see the look in his eyes. And the fact that it's directed at me makes things even worse. My heart starts beating fast. He walks over until he is standing next to me. I can feel my heart now beating in my throat. Bahole is intimidating and scary. Worse than my dad when he is angry.

"Do you ever use your brain? Ever?" I swallow the meat that's already in my mouth so fast I'm surprised it didn't get stuck in my throat.

"What are you talking about?" I ask with a shaky voice.

"Bab'Khumalo. Did you have to cheapen yourself like that? What is wrong with you Tivikele? Do you ever use your brain or your vagina does the thinking for you?"

"Okay Bahole stop, what's going on?" My dad asks. I know what's going on. I don't think I want my dad knowing about my escapades.

"It was a mistake. We didn't know he was there." I'm trying to stop Bahole from saying anything more than he has said and my dad knowing things he shouldn't.

"A mistake? Really? Even if you didn't know he was there couldn't you control yourself until you got into the house? What if someone else had been there with a phone in hand. Your private parts would be floating all over social media right now. Do you know

that?"

"I know. It won't happen again."

"What won't happen again?" My dad asks.

"Bab'Khumalo found your daughter being fucked on top of a car bonnet like a common prostitute."

Silence.

Everyone is quiet. I can't even look at my dad right now. I lift my head up to look at my mum and she has her eyes closed. I'm not sure what anyone is thinking.

"Tivikele. What is your brother talking about?" I know my dad is angry judging by his calmness right now.

"It was a mistake." Bahole chuckles and takes a seat.

"A mistake? Don't make me laugh." He says.

"Tivikele! I asked you a question. When did this thing happen?"

"Last night."

"Where?"

"At Andile's house. I didnt know Bab'Khumalo would be there."

"So this is what you do? You go around acting like a whore." My head immediately shoots up and I look at him. "You're a whore now?"

"Of course not."

"Can we just calm down a bit and talk about this." My mum butts in.

"Not now Sbongile. Tivikele how many times do you do this? Go around having sex in random places?"

"I dont do that. It was a once off thing."

"A once of thing that could have had you trending on social media?" Bahole and my dad like to tag team us when they want.

"For heavens sake, I'm sorry. It wont happen again." I get up to leave.

"Sit your ass down." My dad shouts and bangs the table. I turn and sit back down.

"When did you become a whore Tivikele, I know I didnt raise you to be one. What is wrong with you?" I feel tears sting my eyes and I try so hard to blink them away. I don't even know how Bahole found out about this. I know Bab'Khumalo wouldnt go around talking about something like that. But what hurts right now is my dad calling me a whore. How do you even define a whore? I've only ever had sex with five people since I lost my virginity, and one stupid choice and I'm reduced to a whore.

"I'm not a whore baba."

"You sure know how to act like one." He gets up and throws the serviette on the table before walking away with mum following behind him. I was so looking forward to this lunch. When he is out of sight I get up and take my plate to the kitchen. The anger rising inside me sends me back to my brother.

"Are you happy?" He gets up and looks at me.

"Happy that my sister is a whore? No."

"I'm not a whore Bahole, and remember you're not a saint either. So before you start pointing fingers at me remember three more are pointing back at you."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"It means I know about you forcing Zama to have an abortion but you dont see me calling you a murderer." I feel a sting on my cheek. Stupid idiot slapped me.

"Ungangijwayeli amasimba wena (dont talk shit.)"

"Truth hurts doesnt it." I put my plate back on the table and go upstairs. When I pass my parents room I hear them arguing.

"This is all your fault." I hear my dad say.

"Of course. Konkhe ngimi vele (it's all me.)" Mum answers.

"Of course it is. You've turned Tivikele into your best friend. She's your child, maybe you should start acting like it. How am I even supposed to look at Khumalo now?" I felt the tears I thought were gone

come back in full force.

"She made a mistake, but calling her a whore, you crossed the line Majola."

"Mxm. What do you expect me to call her? She acts like a whore I'll call her a whore. She's embarrassing right now. How are people even supposed to look at her, how long before people question her morals? People will be wondering if she didn't sleep her way to the top, and you know how rumours travel."

First I was a whore now I'm an embarrassment. Nice. I let my legs carry me to my room. I throw myself on the couch and let my fears fall. I wonder how Bahole even found out. I decide to call the one person who can give me answers.

"Hey, how are you?"

"How did my brother find out about last night?" I dont have time for chit chat I need answers. Even if those answers won't help me much.

"What are you talking about?"

"My brother came home guns blazing because he knows. Now I'm being called a whore and a common prostitute. I know your father didn't tell him so how did he find out? Who did you tell?"

"I didn't tell anyone, well except Nkanyezi."

"Well done. Now everyone knows."

"I'm sorry okay, I didn't expect him to go blabbing his mouth. I'm sorry."

"It doesn't matter, it's done." I hang up the phone and lay there wondering what I need to do.

Apologizing to my father would be a waste of time right now. When he is pissed he is pissed and nothing can change his mind.

I don't know when I fell asleep but when I woke up it was dark and Gcinile was sleeping behind me. I found five missed calls from Andile and a few others from Makhosi's new number. When I looked at the

time it was almost ten o'clock. If I leave now I will be in Joburg before sunrise. I got off the bed and got my things together. I went to the bathroom and washed my face. When I got back to the bedroom Gcinile was sitting on the bed.

"You're leaving?"

"Yep." I answered putting on my shoes.

"You can't run forever Tivi."

"I'm not running, I'm giving your father space. You know how he gets when he is angry. And now he is busy blaming mum for my choices."

"Why would he blame mum?"

"Apparently mum and I being close is a problem."

"That's absurd. She's your mother."

"I know. But maybe me not being here will give them time to go back to where they were before I embarrassed them."

"I guess. He'll come around you know." I shrug my

shoulders and get my bag.

"Let me walk you out." She gets off the bed and walks me out. The house is quiet, although the light in my parents bedroom is still on. One of them is still up. We walk out of the house and I get my car out of the garage. I get off after turning it to face the gate and hug my sister.

"I'm going to miss you." She says.

"I'll miss you too. Come to Joburg when schools close."

"I will. As long as you make sure there'll be enough money for me to go shopping." I laugh.

"Wena you like sucking me dry. I love you Okay."

"I love you too. Baba will come around. And just so we are clear, I don't think you are a whore."

"Thanks sis. Let me go. I have a long drive ahead."

"Please be careful. And call me every hour so I know

you're still fine."

"Will do. Bye." I get in my car drive out.

My phone rings an hour into my drive.

"Hello!"

"Why are you not sleeping?"

"I could ask you the same thing."

"I own a club so sleep is a luxury to me. Where are you?"

"I'm in my car."

"Where are you going? And where are you coming from?"

"I'm going to Joburg from Durban."

"At this time of the night Tivikele. Why would you do that? What's the rush?"

"Its complicated."

"Okay, please drive safe. And call me if anything happens."

"Sure. Bye."

I hung up and kept on driving. I didnt even have the energy to stop along the way for a pee or even to get energy drinks. The cap I was wearing gave people the impression that I was a man. I put some music on and kept driving. I was tired and sleepy but I had to keep going.

Just when I was about to get into Joburg I slowed down while approaching a traffic light. I wasnt willing to stop because hijackings happen everywhere. While I was slowly driving I heard the breaking of glass. When I looked behind me my car window was broken and there was glass all over the seat. When I looked out the window I saw two figures running towards me. I put the cat in gear and drove as fast as I could. When I looked in the rearview mirror I saw a car following me. I kept driving even when I saw the sirens of a police car.

I don't know what possessed me but I found myself

driving into Makhosi's club. Even though there were people outside I still felt safer being here at this moment.

THE PLAYERS GUIDE

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Unedited ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

I've never been more afraid in my whole life. Yes driving from Durban to Joburg was probably a bad idea but I had to leave. Makhosi helped me when the cops showed up. They wanted to give me a ticket for speeding but he explained everything to them and I went away with a warning then he drove me home.

"Are you sure you'll be okay?" He asked as soon as we got to my place. He placed my laptop bag on the couch.

"I'll be okay, thanks."

"What possessed you to drive in the middle of the night anyway?" He gets on top of the counter dangling his legs around. I sigh and get on top of the counter too.

"Its nothing. I just missed my place."

"You don't expect me to believe that do you?" I get down from the counter and take a bottle of water from the fridge.

"Honestly its nothing. Thank you for driving me. I just need to rest a bit." He jumped down from the counter and looked at me with pity in his eyes. I hate that. I hate pity.

I walked him to the door. He opened the door and turned around to hug me. It felt weird but comfortable. He kissed me on the forehead before letting go of me. I closed the door and walked to my room. The sky was already red with the first rays of sunrise so a shower would have to wait. I got into bed and turned on my phone. I had almost ten missed calls from Mabutho. I know him and I are close but I wasn't ready to hear what he thinks of me too.

I still dont understand how my actions would turn

me into a whore. So I had sex on the bonnet of a car, in someone's house, someone I've known since I was a teenager. The only thing I regret about that whole scenario was Bab'Khumalo seeing us like that. Other than that I have no regrets. The most painful part of this whole thing is my father calling me a whore. I'm no saint I know, but a whore? That's just pushing it. From anyone else it wouldn't matter much, but from my own father it cut deep.

I fell asleep just as the sunrise made its grand entrance. I was woken up by the sound of soft music playing in the lounge. When I looked at the time it was just after one pm. My friends would have definitely told me if they were coming and I know the music was being played by someone. I got off the bed and went to the lounge. I got a vase in the passage and tiptoed to the lounge. There was no one there but the tv was on. I went to the kitchen and Mabutho was next to the stove cooking. Only then did I recognize the aroma of beef stew with dumplings.

"I should have never given you an extra key." He turns around and smiles. He closes the pot and walks over to me. He takes the vase and puts it away.

"What were you going to do with that anyway?"

"Beat the shit out of you." He laughs and gives me the warmest hug.

"I'm the one who should be beating the shit out of you. Why would you drive all night, alone?"

"You know why. Do you also think I'm a whore?" He frowns.

"Of course not. You're human Tivikele. And you're young. You're allowed to explore and figure out what it is that you like and don't like. It doesn't make you a whore, it makes you a woman who is in charge of her own body. People might not understand that but it is what it is. We are living in the twenty first century, things are not the way they used to be in the fifty's. Would I like you to meet one person and settle down then yes, but I want you to do that when you are good and ready for it. It would be careless to get

into a relationship with someone just because you feel pressured to. Enjoy your life and do what makes you happy. Although you did traumatize Bab'Khumalo but I'm sure he will be fine." I wipe the tears on my face and throw myself at him. He hugs me and just let's me savor the moment.

"I didn't mean to disappoint ubaba."

"I know. I know." The door opens and Gcinile walks in with a few bottles of wine. I can't believe they are both here. She joins us and we do a group hug.

"Okay that's enough." She says and walks away. She likes to pretend she hates hugs but she loves them just as much as we do. "By the way, you need to call your mother, she's been calling me non stop." I let go of Mabutho and sit on the high chair while they are busy cooking. I watch them move around the kitchen and say a silent prayer thanking God that atleast I have them on my corner.

I went to the bedroom and got my phone. There

were missed calls from mum. I guess when she couldn't get hold of me she called Gcinile. I sit on the bed and call her back.

"Tivikele Nomzamo Majola. Where are you?" I'm not sure if she's angry or concerned but I'm glad I'm not close enough to see it.

"I'm in Joburg mama." I hear her sigh.

"Why didnt you tell me? And when did you leave cause I know you didnt leave this morning. I would have seen you leave."

"I left last night after waking up from my nap."

"And you couldnt be bothered to even say goodbye."

"I'm sorry. After what happend at lunch I didn't want to make dad uncomfortable."

"Uncomfortable? Tivikele this is your home. That's one place you should run to not away from. And whatever your father said was out of anger."

"So blaming you for my choices was also out of anger?"

"What?"

"I heard him say that I act the way i do because of your teachings." She sighs.

"Baby, whatever happens between your father and I has nothing to do with you."

"Right! I'll call you later. Butho is cooking lunch?"

"He is there?"

"Yes. Gcinile too. I'll call you later okay."

"You know I love you right?"

"I know. I love you too." I hang up before she could say anything else.

I get up and walk out. My phone rings as I approach the kitchen. It's an unsaved number.

"Hello."

"I take it you are rested now?"

"I am. Thank you for everything Makhosi. I owe you one."

"Dinner will do." I giggle like a love struck teenager. "Your insurance came and picked up the car. They said they will have it fixed in no time."

"I don't remember giving you my insurance details."

"Found them in your glove box. So about that dinner?" I guess I can't be too mad at that. He has been super helpful the past few hours. I guess one dinner won't hurt.

"Give me the date, time and place and I'll be there."

"Perfect."

"Question. Why do you keep using different numbers to call me?" He chuckles and ends up actually laughing.

"Because you blocked my number now I have to go through back doors to talk to you." Oh yeah. Theres that. "So when are you unblocking me?"

"I'mpress me with dinner and I might just consider it. Goodbye Mr Khuzwayo."

"Goodbye Mrs Khuzwayo."

I hang up and throw myself on the couch with a smile on my face. I'm not even sure why I'm smiling like a retard. People go to dinners all the time. Its nothing to write home about.

"Future or current boyfriend?" Gcinile brings me back from my little day dream.

"What?"

"The one responsible for that smile on your face?
Future or current?"

"I don't know."

One thing I try to avoid is uncertainty. I dont know why I have all these weird feelings about Makhosi. I dont know why my heart somehow feels so comfortable with him. But more than anything I dont know what that means for my future and my plans. And that scares me.

A horizontal sequence of 20 black dots, representing the first 20 natural numbers.

NARRATED

In Winston Park, Durban, Sibongile Majola is in her bedroom getting ready to go to work when her husband walks in. He is taken aback when he sees her in her scrubs.

"You going somewhere?" He asks.

"Work?" She answers not looking at him.

"You're supposed to be off today." He walks to the bed and takes a seat. She turns around with her hand on her waist.

"Now I'm not. Do you have a problem with that?"

"Of course not. Where are the kids, maybe I can take them to lunch."

"If you can make it to Joburg before lunch time is over maybe you can." She turns back to the mirror and continues with what she was doing.

"Joburg? When did they leave? I've been here all day,

I'm sure I would have seen them leave."

"Well they are gone."

"Why wouldn't they say anything?" She turns to look at her husband again.

"What did you want them to say? Wena na Bahole decided to tag team and embarrass Tivikele, was she supposed to come back to you after you called her a whore?"

"If the shoe fits." She chuckles and walks closer to where he is sitting.

"Is that all you're going to say? 'If the shoe fits'? Really Majola? You've possibly hurt your daughter in ways no man ever has and all you can say is 'if the shoe fits.' Who are you?"

"I am a father. Maybe if you were more of a mother to her we wouldn't be having this conversation."

"Right. The same way Bahole would atleast have one of his kids running around in this house instead of getting girls pregnant and then have them go

through the painful process of an abortion. You're no saint Qhawe Majola. If you'd been a father to your son you'd have grandkids by now." She grabs her bag and walks out with her husbands eyes boring holes into her back.

She gets into her car and drives to Hillcrest. She pulls up to Bahole's house. She knocks on the door and waits for him to open. Its Sunday, and she knows he is home. Theres some shuffling on the other side of the door before it flies open and a sleepy Bahole shows his face. Before he could even say anything he is pushed back into the house by the impact of the slap his mother gives him.

"Ma, what the heck?" He has his hand on his cheek and is walking backwards while his mother is slowly charging at him like a cheetah on the hunt. He unfortunately is blocked by the wall behind him and that gives his mother ample chance to slap him once more. "Ma. Kanti what's going on?"

"Listen to me Bahole Nhlanhla Majola,
awunamtfwana wena (you dont have a child.) So you
have no right to put your hands on my child."

"Did she tell you what she did before that?"

"I don't care what she did. I raised you better than
that. I know I didnt raise you to put your hands on a
woman, sister or not."

"Oh so now I'm the problem? Meanwhile she's being
fucked on bonnets like a prostit....." another slap
silences the rest of the word from leaving his lips.

"You're her brother, correcting her when she is wrong
is expected, but embarrassing her like that was out
of line. You're the one who should be defending her
instead you're the one bashing her."

"Bashing her to who? Her family?"

"I dont care who was at that table. You could have
called her aside and spoke to her like her big brother
not some wannabe savage. Thanks to your stupidity
she left her home, the one place where she should

feel safe and drove to Joburg in the middle of the night, alone. Anything could have happened to her but you're more concerned about your reputation than her heart. Congratulations Bahole, you've just ruined your relationship with your sister. I hope you're happy."

She walks out leaving him standing in the same position. After a while he comes back to his senses. He takes his phone and calls his sister. Tivikele sees the call and puts the phone on silence.

"Who was that?" Mabutho asks.

"No one important. Turn the movie on." She sits with her two siblings with the movie playing and Gcinile resting her head on her big sisters lap. The only one missing now was Mzwandile. If only China wasnt so far

THE PLAYERS GUIDE

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Unedited ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

Date night is upon me. I don't know what Makhosi has planned. All he told me was that I should be ready by seven PM. I decided to go home early to prepare for the date. I got home and there was a huge box sitting pretty by the door. I picked it up and went into the house. I placed it on the couch and got myself a glass of water. I came back and looked at the box. It was cute. I opened it and inside I was met with a cute white box with a gold ribbon decorating it. It seems like a crime to open it but I need to know what's inside.

I released the ribbons and opened the top of the box. I was met by a white envelope. I opened the envelope. It was from Makhosi.

'Your outfit for tonight. I hope you like it. I cant wait to see you. M.K.'

I put the card aside and pulled the wrapping paper aside. Inside the box was a gold glittery dress. I held it up and it was beautiful. It was long with a slit on the side and spaghetti straps. I got nervous just looking at it. I was hoping for a chilled picnic type of date or even a movie date but clearly this man is planning on going all out. Inside the box there was also shoes. Strappy black sandals.

My phone rang just as I was getting ready to take a shower. My dads name flashed on the screen. I've been ignoring his calls since I left home. I'm not ready to hear him call me a whore one more time. Bahole has also been trying to call me. I should just do myself a favour and block them. Andile has been another pain in the ass. This is all his fault. If he had kept his mouth shut we wouldnt be here right now.

I let the call go to voicemail and go take my shower. When I get out I find a missed call from my mother. A part of me wants to believe this could be my dad using mums phone, but what if it is her? I cant ignore her too. I call her number back.

"Mummy, I got your missed call."

"Tivikele. It's me." His voice bellows through the speaker. I feel my heart racing immediately. I keep quiet and wait for him to say something but it seems he is also waiting for me to speak. I didnt call him so I'm not saying a damn thing. The silence goes on for a while until it gets uncomfortable.

"Baba I'm in the middle of a meeting, what's going on?" I know I just lied to my father but it's the only way to get the awkwardness out of the way.

"You didnt say goodbye when you left." And here I was hoping the first words out of his mouth would be 'I'm sorry.' I guess that's just wishful thinking.

"I had things to do that needed my attention."

"So you had to drive in the middle of the night? What if you'd been hijacked?"

"I wasn't. Look I'd love to stay and chat but like I said, I'm in the middle of a meeting. I'll call you later." I cut the call and sit on the bed. Someone told me once that at some point in all our lives we will have to accept apologies that were never given. And I guess parents are the biggest people we have to accept those apologies not given.

My phone rings again and this time it's my friend Thobile.

"Hey."

"We are outside. Open up." She says then hangs up. I wrap a towel around me and go open the door.

"Hey. What are you guys doing here?" I ask as they walk in.

"We came to see the miracle of you going on a proper date." I know I didn't tell them a damn thing so

how did they know.

"What are you...." and then it dawn's on me that Pinky had something to do with this. "Never mind. I need to get ready so you'll help me. Bring that box with you." I leave them and head to the bedroom.

"This is really a miracle, you're even letting him buy you gifts." Simz says and walks into the bedroom while I'm busy lotioning. They throw themselves on the bed and watch me.

"I didnt let him buy me anything, he did it all on his own."

"He has good taste. This dress is stunning." Thobile says running her hands through it.

"I know. Now I'm curious to know where he is taking me."

"Clearly it will be somewhere fancy. The dress clearly proves that." Simz answered.

I got dressed with them watching me and making

comments. The dress fit perfectly. It's almost like it was made for me. I put on my gown and Thobi helped me with my makeup while Simz styled my weave. Speaking of which, I need to book an appointment with my hairstylist. My hair needs some TLC.

When these two are done I look in the mirror and boy I look like a dream, even if I have to say so myself. My phone beeps and Thobi gets it.

"Your driver is waiting for you outside." She announces with a grin on her face. He didn't tell me I was getting a driver.

"Tell him I will drive myself. He must just send the address." I see these two exchange looks through the mirror. I turn around to look at them. Thobi is not typing anything. "Did you hear what I just said?"

"I did. But I'm not telling him that. The man clearly is going through a whole lot of trouble to make this date perfect, and you're not going to ruin it. Just for tonight pack your little Miss Independent self away

and let this man wine and dine you the way you deserve." Thobi can be stubborn when she wants to be. And I know I wont win this one cause she has my phone in her hand.

"What if I get bored and want to leave? Driving myself there will mean I have a way out."

"That's your problem. You're always looking for a way out. Knowing you you'd probably leave just because he ordered the wrong kind of wine. So no. You're getting a driver and that's that." Simz answers. It's two against one, well three if you consider Makhosi too. I sighed and got up from the chair. I pulled off my gown and got my clutch bag. I held out my hand for my phone and Thobi gave it to me.

"I guess I'm ready to go then."

"Perfect. We'll walk you out." I know they are only doing that to make sure I don't get into my car once I'm outside. We walk out and there is a beautiful dark Mercedes parked outside my place. The driver gets out when he sees me walking out. Thobi locks the

door and hands me the keys.

"Enjoy. We will call you later to get all the details."

Simz says.

"And please do not disappoint us." I chuckle and hug them then walk towards the car. The driver looks familiar. As soon as I get close to him I stop.

"Sphetho? What are you doing here?" He gives me that charming smile that probably melts all the teenage girls he meets.

"I'm here to drive you to your date."

"Okay. I didnt know you had another job."

"Its just a side hustle." His smile wont leave his face. You'd think he was enjoying this. I get into the car and he closes the door before he gets in too and drives off.

Thirty minutes later we are still in the car. There is some slow music playing. There are refreshments in the car. Sphetho gave me a glass of champagne that

I'm still holding on to. I'm nervous. I hope this date goes, well I dont know what I'm hoping for. At this point I'm so nervous I just want it to be over and done with.

We get to Centurion and he drives to what looks like an estate. Its beautiful. He pulls up to this modern looking house with two garages. Sphetho parks the car and gets out to open the door for me. The grass is greener than that of a stadium. There are lights which light up everytime I step on the concrete pathway. Sphetho leads the way to the front door. He knocks, smiles at me and leaves me there.

My heart goes into overdrive when I hear footsteps coming towards the door. He opens the door and he looks like he just got off a runway. And he smells divine too. I dont know what cologne he is wearing but its tantalizing.

"Wow, that dress looks even better on you." He is

looking at me from head to toe, taking it all in.

"Thank you." I say blushing.

"Come on in." He holds out his hand and I take it. He leads me into the house and its empty. No decor, no chairs, no nothing. "Dont mind the emptiness." He says as if he read my mind.

"Whose house is this anyway? Dont tell me we broke into a house that's being sold?" He chuckles.

"No. It's my family home. My dad bought it a while back. Turns out farming is a lucrative business if done right. Come." He leads me to the backyard and it's way, way better than the empty house.

The backyard overlooks what looks like a golf course. There is a tiny lake in the middle of the green grass. Its beautiful. But it doesn't measure up to what's happening in this backyard. There is a round table set up on the edge of the pool. There are flowers all over the pool. If I didn't know better I'd say the pool is completely made of flowers. There are red, pink and white Rose's. The flowers in the

pool compliment the flowers on the table. He leads me to my seat and opens the chair for me. I sit down and he pours the wine and hands it to me before he takes a seat.

"So, how am I doing so far?" He asks and sips his wine.

"So far so good. But why here though? Why not a restaurant?"

"That's too basic. For someone like you, I believe you deserve only the best. Are you ready for the starter?"

"Yes please." He rings a small bell and a chef comes out of the house. I didnt see anyone when I was in there. But then again I didn't see the kitchen. As he gets closer his face becomes clearer. This isnt just any chef. This is Zizo Magaqa. He was trained under the famous Gordon Ramsey. Anyone who knows Gordon Ramsey knows he is huge. And Zizo is right up there with him. And he is here, serving me. I'm having a fangirl moment right now but I cant even show it. I don't want to embarrass myself.

"Your starters. I have prepared grilled lobster tails with lemon and herb butter. Enjoy." He exchanges a look with Makhosi before going back into the house.

"How did you get Zizo Magaqa to cook for you?"

"You mean cook for us?"

"Yeah that. How did you get him to cook for us?"

"He lost a bet." He answers. Okay but how does he even know him? "I deliver milk and meat to his restaurant." I'm beginning to think he can read minds. "Okay enough about Zizo. So tell me who is Tivikele?"

"Well, I am just a normal girl, with big dreams. My parents are both doctors, my dad is a neurosurgeon and my mum is a neurologist. I have three brothers and one sister. My sister decided to follow in our parents footsteps."

"Impressive. No wonder you're so smart. So what are your big dreams?"

"I want to be a tech mogul."

"Okay. So Elon Musk needs to watch out." I chuckle and try to focus on the food.

"Enough about me, your turn." He sips his wine and sits back on the chair.

"Well, I come from a family of seven kids."

"Your parents were busy." He laughs.

"Well yours aren't far behind. My dad is a farmer and mum is a professional housewife although she did study teaching."

Our dinner is more fun than I thought it would be. Makhosi isn't as bad as I imagined him to be. Sure he is a player of note but he is still a good guy. As far as I can see. Zizo outdid himself with the food. Not that I expected anything less.

After dinner everything was cleared from the table. Makhosi led me back inside the house.

"The house is beautiful."

"Thank you. Maybe you can decorate it." Okay. We seem to be on the fast lane right now and he needs to slow down.

"Hold your horses. I havent even unblocked you yet." He laughs and turns to look at me.

"You're feisty. I like that." He says with his face close to mine. Way too close. "Come on, let's go rest." He whispers way too close to my mouth. He holds my hand and leads me up the stairs. I stop midway when my senses decide to make a return.

"Wait, I'm not staying here."

"Relax. We are not going to do anything."

"Makhosi?"

"I promise you nothing will happen. We will just sleep here. Nothing else. I swear." He makes a cross on his chest. Is that even supposed to make me trust him?

At this point I dont need to give my dad anymore ammunition against me. He already thinks I'm a whore. What happens when he finds out I spent a night a man I went on a first date with? The upside though is that he is in Durban and I dont think he will come here anytime soon. And Makhosi did promise nothing would happen. So what do I have to lose.

I put my hand back in his and walk up the stairs. The rooms are all empty except for the main bedroom. It had a bed and a side table. It feels weird to be honest. It's like visiting a boyfriend who lives in Midrand. But Centurion is just a few minutes away so maybe the Midrand tendencies have spilled over to Centurion.

He hands me a pair of shorts and a vest beford walking out. I take off the dress and put on the clothes he gave me. He comes back with a couple of wipes in his hand.

"I'm not sure which ones work for you but I thought I'd get you wipes for the make up." He is busy looking at the wipes in his hands. I walk over and take one and go to the bathroom. I wipe makeup off. I find a spare toothbrush in the cupboard and brush my teeth. When I get back in the bedroom he is already in the bed. I get in next to him and we cuddle. Maybe Simz and Thobi were right. This does feel like a miracle.

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Unedited ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

"Stop staring, it's rude."

"I cant help it. When you're sleeping you look so innocent." What the fuck is he talking about? I'm always innocent. "Anyone who would see you sleeping would not think you're crazy. But you are."

"So you woke up and chose violence vele?" He throws his head back laughing. And for some strange reason his laugh feeling up the room and his face lighting up makes me happy.

"See. I told you, you're crazy. Get up, we have a long day ahead of us. Let's go take a shower." He gets off the bed and holds his hand out for me. Is it weird that we slept the whole night and he didnt make any moves on me? I mean I know it wasnt a must but still.

"Go bath, I'll go after you."

"No. We will take a bath together." He goes to the bathroom and opens the water to fill up the tub. I'm kind of freaking out. I've never showered with a man, which might sound weird because he has seen me naked but that was different. Plus what if I get turned on and he doesn't do shit about it. Can I really control myself. Dear Lord I hope I don't make a mockery of myself.

"Okay, stop daydreaming. Let's go." He picks me up from the bed and I let out a loud squeal. I figure he won't let me down so I might as well have fun. I decide to play drums with his buttcheeks and he laughs. "And you think you're sane." He says when he puts me down in the bathroom.

He pulls the vest up and over my head slowly. My nipples decide at that moment to make themselves known and he chuckles. He squats down and pulls the shorts down. I hold on to his shoulder and lift my

one leg then the other. His touch sends different sensations all over me. He pulls my underwear down and somehow I feel self conscious with his head so close to my cookie jar.

He stands up and takes off his clothes then helps me into the tub. It's big enough for the both of us. He lays back on the tub and I sit between his legs. I say a silent prayer hoping i dont sit on top of his dick and break it. That would be a tragedy.

"Tell me something, what made you decide to start a business?" He asks. His hand and mine are intertwined and he keeps playing with my fingers. I swear it feels like with every sensation that he gives me he takes a peace of my heart.

"I'm very bad when it comes to taking orders, especially from men." He laughs. I swear his laugh is beautiful. I should record him laughing and turn that into a ringtone. Oh God. What the fuck is happening right now?

"So why is your name Tivikele? That's a Swati name and wena you are Zulu."

"Half Zulu actually. My mum is Swati."

"Same thing. Swati's and Zulus are one thing."

"Nope. They are not. Even the languages are different in some ways."

"Swati is Zulu that went to public school." I didnt mean to but I laughed. I've heard that before. And it's quite stupid if you ask me.

"You wish. Just let us have our language in peace please." He laughs.

"So does that mean our kids will speak Swati too?"

"Yep, most definitely. And they will attend the reed dance too." I see him smile on the mirror in front of us. And then it dawn's on me why he is smiling. Damnit.

We take out bath and talk about anything and everything. When we get out he gets a towel and wipes me down with it. I swear it feels like I am

being tested right now. How does he run his hands all over me like that and expect me to stay still? I close my eyes and savour the sensation when he goes down my legs. He moves the towel up my leg until I feel his hand touching my coochie. I hold my breath until he stands up and says he is done.

He gets body lotion from the cabinet and then we walk to the bedroom. He opens the body lotion and I can tell what he wants to do. And I can't have that unless he wants me to cum all over his floor. I quickly grab the bottle from him and walk to the other side of the room. He stands there with his hands on his waist looking at me, his dick sitting pretty winking at me. I make the conscious choice to focus on the lotioning that I am doing. Not that I'm succeeding at it.

"So tell me, how does an empty house have a bed but no other furniture?" I'm trying so hard to distract myself right now. "Or maybe this is your love nest,

where you bring all your girls?" I dont know why that realization leaves a sour taste in my mouth. What if this really is his love nest? I wonder how many girls has he brought here. I feel a dull aching feeling in my chest. He grabs the lotion from the bed and starts lotioning.

"Its not a love nest. No one has ever been here. Besides it's a family home."

"Why would you bring me to your family home?"

"Because it's where you belong." He walks to the closet and comes back with some clothes. Now what am I going to wear cause I know for a fact I'm not wearing that dress again. I cant even comment on his little statement. Once I get this korobela (love portion) out of my body things will go back to normal.

He hands me a white dress. I put it on and it's a bit short. Not too short though as it comes to a few centimeters above my knees. It has spaghetti straps and it gives me just enough cleavage to make me

feel sexy. He has taste shem, I'll give him that.

"Nice dress. Did your girlfriend choose it for you?" He laughs and puts on his t-shirt.

"Your green eyed monster is showing." I roll my eyes and put on the sneakers he gave me. I didn't bring make up so I'll just have to go bare faced. Atleast I have some lipstick and a mascara so that will have to do. I take out my tiny mirro and use it to put the mascara and lipstick on.

"I'm done, can we go now?" He is taken back by my snapping. I didn't mean to though.

"Are you okay?"

"I'm fine. Can we go?" I cant believe I'm wearing a dress one of his many booty calls bought. Come to think of it its itchy. I'm sure she bought it in some thrift shop. As soon as I get home I'm burning this shit.

"You can relax. My sister made the dress."

"What?"

"The dress, my 'girlfriend' didn't choose it, my sister made it. She's a fashion design student, she also made the dress you wore last night."

"Mhmmm. She's gifted."

I grab my clutch bag walk out of the bedroom. As soon as I'm outside the bedroom and I know he is not behind me the butterflies in my stomach, like a well synchronized choir make their presence felt. And the smile on my face is unmissable. Even my cheeks are turning red, I even missed the smell of bacon coming from the kitchen.

I get downstairs and find Zizo back in the kitchen doing his thing. He has some eggs and tomatoes on the counter with bacon and mushrooms too. Now I know I'm hungry.

"Hi!" He turns around from the stove and looks at me

with a smile on his face. He is cuter in person. Thobi is going to die when she finds out he was cooking, for me.

"The future Mrs Khuzwayo. Good morning."

"Let me guess, this is still part of the bet losing."

"He told you?"

"Yep. Maybe you should lose more bets. Last night's meal was divine."

"Thank you, I try." Humble too. Nice. "Please have a seat." I sit on the bar stool and he dishes up for me. It's really weird being a man. This house is technically empty but it has bar stools and a bed.

Zizo places a plate in front of me that looks like it just came out of a five star restaurant, well it was prepared by a five star chef. I take my phone out of my bag to take a picture. Thobi must know who made this breakfast. As soon as I turn it on I find a bunch of missed calls from my family and friends. I decide to call my mum first. I excuse myself and

walk out to the backyard and in the corner of my eye
I see Makhosi going to the kitchen.

"Mummy."

"Wena nhloko yakho lenkhulu (you big head), why
dont you answer your phone?"

"So much drama kodwa Mvuleni."

"Do you know how worried I was?"

"Ngyacolisa. I kind of got lost in the moment."

"What moment?"

"I was on a date. Well I'm still on a date."

"Oh my god! With who?" She's forgotten she was
angry just seconds ago and now she is looking for
gossip.

"I will call you later and tell you all about it. For now
my breakfast is getting cold."

"If you don't call me I'm coming to Joburg, you'll tell
me face to face. Dont get pregnant." I chuckle.

"Relax. I love you."

"I love you too." I hang up and go back into the house.

I find Makhosi leaning on the counter with a peace of bacon in his hand. I look at my plate and it's missing bacon. I look at my plate, back at him, back at my plate and back at him again. He stops chewing under my gaze.

"You're eating my bacon." Zizo chuckles.

"But theres more bacon." He says pointing to the one peace of bacon. I dont care about the other one I want the one that was in my plate so I can take a picture.

"Okay, dish it up the way it was." I fold my arms and stare at him. Zizo bursts out laughing while this one is standing there like a statue.

"Here. I made another plate for you." Zizo says placing a fresh plate in front of me. He takes the old

one and hands it to Makhosi. "You can have that one. Miss, it was nice meeting you. I have to get going. Enjoy your breakfast."

"I will. Thank you very much." He hugs me and grabs his knife.

"I'll walk you out." Makhosi says.

As soon as they walk out I start snapping away and sending the pics to Thobi. When she calls me back I don't answer and just eat my delicious food.

"Now I know to stock up on bacon." He says as he walks into the kitchen.

"You shouldn't be eating other people's food without their permission."

"You just love food wena. Let's go."

"I'm not done eating. Shouldn't we be cleaning up first?"

"Sphetho is coming, he will clean up." Speaking of

that one.

"How do you know Sphetho?"

"He is my brother." That sneaky.....

"But he is a Bhengu. How is he your brother?"

"He is a Khuzwayo, mum is a Bhengu."

"Did you send him to spy on me?"

"Of course not. I didnt even know he worked for you until a few days ago."

"I don't believe you."

"You dont have to. Let's go." He grabs my bag and phone and helps me down from the bar stool.

We walk out and get into his car. I'm not sure what to feel about his brother working for me under false pretenses. He gets into the car and starts driving. He is talking but I don't hear a thing he is saying. The car comes to a standstill somewhere. I turn to look at him and he is looking at me too.

"I did not send him to spy on you. You have to believe me."

"Didn't you say I don't have to believe you?"

"I did, because I didn't think it mattered. But now you're upset."

"I'm not upset. Can we go."

"Tivikele, I swear on my grandfather's life, I did not send Sphetho there. God is my witness." Did he have to bring God into this?

"It's fine Makhosi."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, let's go."

He starts the car again and we drive away. I'm still not sure about Sphetho but I'll deal with him on Monday. For now I'm just going to enjoy myself. He pulls up to the Henops Picnic Spot. It's not that full, maybe it's still a bit early. There is a picnic spot that's already set up. It looks beautiful. There's wine and cheese, meat and fruit platters and some wine.

He helped me sit down. While I was looking around the place he handed me a bouquet of Rose's. I took them and pulled out the card.

'Will you be my girlfriend?' Read the card.

Below the words there were two boxes with the words 'yes' and 'definitely' next to them. I thought the opposite of yes was no.

"These are the only options I have?"

"Yes." He handed me a pen. I looked at the card and ticked the definitely box and handed the card to him. He opened it and smiled when he saw my answer. He gave me a hug and we giggled like two teenagers. Good thing there isn't too many people here. I guess I am officially a girlfriend.

Where does one take girlfriend lessons?

THE PLAYERS GUIDE

16

Unedited ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

"I'm floating on sunshine, eh

I'm floating on sunshine, eh"

That's how the song goes right? Oh well, I'll do what everyone else does, make my own lyrics.

I feel kind of weird to be quite honest. I'm torn between letting the tiny flutters in my tummy take over and treading carefully. I'm still not fully sure if I can trust this man next to me, but my heart is the one that's making decisions now. Logic has flown out of the window.

We are driving back to Joburg. It took some convincing for him to come back to my place. Dont get me wrong, the house is nice and all, but its empty. The bed doesnt even have a headboard or side tables. It's new I know, but it's still kind of awkward being there with that much echo.

He hasn't said a thing since we left Pretoria. Instead he has been clinging on to my hand. If he is not planting small kisses on my hand while he drives then he is resting my hand either on his thigh or mine. Either way, he refuses to let go of my hand. I guess that's the joy of driving an automatic car, he can use one hand.

I keep stealing glances at him, I guess a part of me is also feeling a little too giddy, and maybe I will wake up and this will be just a dream. But it's not. Soa mattrix, SoulfulG and Shaun101's uthando blasts through the car speakers. The smile on his face as he sings along to the song makes me

wonder how much of this, I've missed out on all these years. I'm scared, but excited.

"Wena

Ungokhethiwe ngabaphansi

K'dala

Ngizulazula, ngifuna wena

Wena

Ungokhethiwe ngabaphansi

K'dala ngizulazula, ng'funa wena

Uthando 'lungaka

Uthando olungaka, thando 'lungaka

Ngaze ngabon' uthando olungaka

Uthando olungaka, 'thando olungaka

Ngaze ngabon' uthando olungaka

Uthando olungaka, uthando olungaka

Ngaze ngabon' uthando olungaka

Uthando olungaka, thando olungaka

Ngaze ngabon' uthando olungaka

Wena

Ungokhethiwe ngabaphansi

K'dala

Ngizulazula, ngifuna wena

Baby, ungokhethiwe ngabaphansi"

He sings along to the song while stealing glances at me. If I was lighter in complexion I'd be red like a winter tomato right now with all the blushing. His smile and laugh makes things worse.

We pull up to my complex and drive in. He parks the car and turns to look at me.

"You're beautiful."

"Thank you." I dont know where this squeaky voice that just left my mouth came from. But I guess he

didn't notice because he lifts my head up and comes closer to me. He gives me an intense look before he kisses me. If I wasn't sitting down I'd need to hold on to something because my knees are slowly turning into jelly. He pulls away and I can feel his smile on my lips.

"Let's go inside." He gets out of the car and opens the door for me.

"My lady." He says. We walk up to the building hand in hand. I'm sure the people in this complex are just as shocked as I am to be holding hands with someone. As soon as we get out of the lift on my floor he pins me against the wall and kisses the life out of me. My apartment is a few steps away but this moment feels so right. And lucky for me there aren't any people roaming around. I pull out of the kiss.

"Unless you want us to give the security guards a show, we have to go in." He laughs and lifts me up. I

wrap my legs around his waist and he carries me the few steps to my apartment. I get the key out of my bag and he takes it and opens the door. We walk in and as soon as the door is closed I am resting on the wall with his lips on my neck. Someone clears their throat. We both look back and I swear time stood still at that moment.

Makhosi puts me down almost in slow motion. I'm not sure what kind of games the underground gang is playing but this is not it. And I'm sure God is having the biggest laugh of his life right now. Twice. Twince in two weeks. Heaven never loved me.

"Baba." He sits there with the newspaper sitting nicely on the arm rest. He is looking at me with disgust in his eyes. "What are you doing here?" Silence. This is worse than awkward. Makhosi and I have been stuck on the same spot. I'm not sure how to react right now. He wont say anything, he wont even get his eyes off of me. Makhosi clears his

throat and walks towards him.

"Uhm, sawubona baba." He extends his hand for a handshake and my father just looks at it like it's a piece of kak. Makhosi can be intimidating when he wants to be but right now I can tell he is intimidated. He pulls his hand back. The door opens and mum and Gcinile walk in giggling about something.

"Oh hey, you're back." Mum says when she sees us. I guess she can smell the awkwardness because she looks from us to my dad and back at us.

"Awkward." Gcinile whispers in my ear as she passes on her way to the kitchen.

"What did I miss?" Mum asks and gets no answer. "Okay then, I'm Sbongile Majola. Tivikele's mother." She says with a bright smile on her face. She gives Makhosi a hug and whispers something to him. I can't make out what it is but it seems to have put Makhosi at ease. When he lets go of her he announces his departure.

"I'll walk you out." I whisper enough for someone to hear me. Mum smiles at me and gives me a wink. I close the door and lean on it from the outside. I take deep slow breaths with my eyes closed. How did my weekend just go from being a dream to a nightmare.

"Are you okay?" Makhosi whispers next to me. I open my eyes and walk away from the door with him behind me.

"Let's go."

"Where are we going?" I press the lift button and wait for it to come up and take me as far away from here as it possibly can.

"Back to Centurion." He chuckles.

"Babe, you can't run from him. At some point you'll have to face him."

"I know but it won't be today." The lift pings announcing its arrival. I get in but I'm pulled back before it closes again.

"I know what just happened is embarrassing to say

the least, but that's still your father, and it wasn't that bad. I think." Oh my guy, you have no idea.

"It's not as simple as that."

"I know. But when it comes to family, nothing is ever simple. You'll just have to put your big girl panties on and go in there and face him. Besides, your mom said she'll make sure everything is okay."

"Is that what she told you?"

"Yes. And I believe her. I know it seems scary but it will be Okay, I promise." He presses the lift button again and we wait for it to come back. "If I could stay I would, but I think I've disrespected him enough as it is." The lift opens again and he walks in after giving me a kiss. "I'll call you later okay." The lift doors close and it's like they took my strength with them.

I take a few deep breaths and then I remember. That's my place, my apartment, I pay the bond and the bill's, what the fuck am I afraid off. I mean he is the one who invaded my private space, if anything he is the one who should be quivering and shaking with

embarrassment, not me. Right. Yes. That's my house, yep. My fucken house.

I walk back into the house and open the door like the owner that I am. He is still stuck on that same spot. Mum and Gcinile are in the kitchen. I take a step towards the kitchen.

"Where is Andile?" His voice stops me dead in my tracks. I turn to look at him.

"Durban, I think."

"So you're cheating on him?"

"Of course not."

"A week ago he had his tongue deep inside you and now you have another man with his tongue deep inside your throat. Is that not cheating?" I need a lawyer for this interrogation honestly.

"I'm not cheating on Andile because I am not in a relationship with him." He shakes his head disgustingly.

"So you sleep with any man that's available for the picking, but then get offended when I say you're a whore?" I feel the embarrassment I felt earlier being slowly replaced with anger.

"You can call me whatever you want Baba, it doesn't matter. At the end of the day I know I'm not a whore. Why are you here anyways?"

"So we are not allowed to come visit you?"

"Of course not. I'm just surprised you can stomach being in a whore's house."

"Tivikele dont forget who you're talking to." He gets up from the couch and takes a few steps towards me. Usually I would take a few steps back but right now I'm angry. And the stubborn girl inside of me refuses to back down.

"The question still stands, what are you doing here? Shouldn't you be with your holier than thou son." I shout.

"That's enough! Both of you!" Mum snaps and

comes in from the kitchen with a dishcloth in her hand. We both stand there staring at each other. Mum always said I took after my dad, especially with my stubbornness, I didn't believe it until now.

"Tivikele, go to your room."

"This is my house." The look I get from my mother sends me scampering to my bedroom. I'm being sent into time out, in my own house? Wonders shall never cease. I open the door and close it then tiptoe back to the passage.

"This is not why we came here Majola." I hear mum say. She might be calm but I can tell she is upset.

"Right. You told me she was out with her friends."

"At some point you have to realise one thing, Tivikele is not a child, she is a grown woman who can make decisions."

"Decisions on who to sleep with every week? Those decisions?"

"You came here to fix your relationship. Do you think

this is fixing it?"

"How many men does she have on rotation every week? Last week it was Andile, today it's some other idiot and next week it will be someone else. Shouldn't we be fixing her whorish ways?"

"Call my daughter a whore one more time Majola, please do it." I peek out and see them standing in the middle of the lounge staring at each other. The tension between them is so thick I'll need a butcher knife to cut it.

I look towards the kitchen and Gcinile is standing by the fridge holding a carrot close to her chest. Even from afar I can see her tears glistening. This is all my fault. My parents are fighting and it's all because of me. I walk out to the lounge and they keep staring at each other. I know I did nothing wrong but I can't afford for my parents to be fighting because of me. If I have to humble myself and apologize then so be it.

"I'm sorry." They both turn to look at me. "I'm sorry I embarrassed you to your friend. I'm sorry you saw what you just saw. It won't happen again."

"Baby!"

"It's okay ma, I was wrong and I'm sorry." I turn back around and go to my room. I throw myself on the bed and try so hard to keep the tears in. I don't want to cry. Crying would just mean the past twenty four hours were a waste. Probably the best twenty four hours of my life. And now they will forever be tainted by what just happened.

The door slightly opens and Gcinile walks in. I turn and face the ceiling with my hands crossed on my tummy like a corpse. Gcinile lays down next to me and we both face the ceiling.

"He is cuter in person." She says and for some reason I smile. He is cuter in person.

"He is, isn't he."

"You guys make a cute couple."

"You think?"

"I know."

"He asked me to be his girlfriend." She turns and rests her head on hand while looking at me.

"Tell me more. I need details." I giggle like a love sick puppy and sit up.

I tell her everything from the moment I got his text telling me about the date to just a few minutes before I walked into the awkwardness I walked into. By the time I'm done Gcinile looks like the yellow emoji with heart eyes.

"That's so romantic. I'm so happy for you." She give me a hug and pulls back again. "So you're officially someone's girlfriend?"

"Well he asked and I said yes, so i guess so."

"More like definitely." We laugh.

"You deserve to be happy sis wam, and I can tell Makhosi makes you happy."

"Maybe he bewitched me. I don't remember ever feeling like this about someone."

"That's how love is supposed to feel like apparently." Maybe this is how love is meant to feel like. I mean I've seen it with my own parents, but right now it feels like their love is slowly fading away, and it's all my fault.

"What do you think mum would have done if dad had called me a whore again?"

"Probably filed for a divorce." She says that so nonchalantly while scrolling down her phone.

"What do you mean file for a divorce." She stops scrolling and looks up at me.

"They've been fighting since that day. Mum has been working overtime at the hospital and dad has been distant. A few days ago I asked him for five thousand and he sent it to me no questions asked. You know he never does that."

"This is all my fault."

"No it's not. Its Bahole's fault. If he had kept his mouth shut we wouldn't be here. Have you spoke to him?"

"No. I have to fix this."

"How?"

"I dont know. Maybe I need to focus on work and forget about man for a while."

"Are you nuts? You just agreed to be Makhosi's girlfriend, are you going to dump him because your father cant accept that you're a grown woman with needs?"

"Needs or not. Our parents cant divorce because of me."

"Look maybe divorce is a bit extreme, I'm pretty sure they will find a way to fix this."

I'm not sure how I can fix this. But I know I have to. Gcinile leaves to help mum in the kitchen. I sit in my room, I don't even know why I'm here. I should be helping in the kitchen but the idea of being in close

proximity to my dad scares me. Especially now that I know him and mum have been fighting. If they get a divorce it will be all my fault.

The door opens and I hear footsteps coming towards the bed. He quietly stands there and says nothing, and whatever is left of my pride wont let me open my mouth and say the first words.

"I'm sorry." I feel tears fall down the side of my face and onto the pillow. I so badly want to turn and look in his eyes but I'm not even sure if he really said those words. What if it was just a dream. "I'm sorry.i shouldn't have called you a whore." Its really him. I wipe the tears and sit up. He is standing on the edge of the bed with his hands in his pockets. He sighs and takes a seat on the bed.

"Look, you're my little girl, I know you're grown and can make your own choices but to me you'll always be my sweet little girl. The idea of you sleeping with

anyone is unsettling to me. But that doesn't justify me calling you names. That's not something you should be hearing from your father. I'm sorry." I throw myself at him and engulfs me in his signature warm hug. "I missed you." He whispers in my ear. "I missed you too."

So that's one problem fixed. Now I need to find a way to fix the problems between him and mom.

THE PLAYERS GUIDE

17

Unedited ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

"Tell me about your date again." If I didnt know better I'd think my mum was writing a memoir. I've had to tell her about my date a few times already, and each time it's like she is hearing it for the first time. But I dont mind telling it. I tell her again and she is smiling like she's just hearing it for the first time.

My dad went back to Durban early in the morning because he has to prep for surgery tomorrow. Mum and Gcinile stayed behind. Its Sunday and I have work tomorrow so they decided they will go home tomorrow morning. Thank you to the Wright brothers for the convenience of flight.

We decided to have dinner at a restaurant instead of cooking. Being a girlfriend seems to be a hard job. Makhosi has been sulking cause I havent seen him since yesterday. Apparently that's the requirement of being a girlfriend, you have to see your boyfriend everyday if possible. In my books that's just being a little too clingy. I mean when do you get to miss a person who you see everyday? It just doesnt make sense.

We get to the restaurant and get seated. The waitress hands us our menus. We make our drink orders and she goes away.

"So when are you seeing your man again?" Gcinile asks. Her and mum seem to enjoy hearing about him. I hope my brothers are just as welcoming. Although I can probably tell you now, Bahole will definitely hate him, Mabutho will give him a hard time but he will eventually warm up to him and Mzwandile is easy to please, get him some comic books and games and he will be your best friend for life.

"I dont know. Maybe tomorrow."

"Why not today?" Mum asks. This one probably thinks she'll be receiving abakhongi by the weekend.

"Can we please just enjoy dinner and leave the Makhosi topic alone?" The look at each other and share a look I dont understand. But their smiles reassures me that maybe it's not something bad so I mize it. The waitress brings our drinks over. I'm having a virgin cocktail because tomorrow is work day and I need to be properly prepared, the girl cant afford to lose focus.

"Okay, we will forget about Makhosi for a second, how is work going?" Mum asks.

"Good. I have to go to Nigeria in a few days to implement the last phase of the software we've created for Joshua Industries."

"What makes you so sure it will work, I know you're good but hackers are good too." Gcinile being the

part time pessimist that she is always has to bring up the worse case scenario in everything.

"It is safe. And I'm sure Joshua Industries will be safe. Besides, it's my reputation on the line. If I get this right imagine the doors that will open."

"So we will be rolling in dough?" She went from being a part time pessimist to seeing dollar signs. Little sisters are a pandemic all on their own honestly, but we love them regardless.

"I dont know about you Dr Majola but I, Miss Majola will be rolling in dough." I lift my glass up and sip. She rolls her eyes and we laugh. Being in Joburg and them being in Durban I miss these girls sessions that we used to have. I know they still do it even when I'm not there but this means a lot to me.

My sister and mum flew to back to Durban early this

morning. It already feels quiet without them but I'm a big girl so I have to build my empire one brick at a time. After dropping them off at the airport I drove to the office. It was still early and it was quiet. No one was here yet which gave me time to catch up on work. My phone rang just as I sat down at my desk.

"Tivikele Majola."

"How about Tivikele Khuzwayo? It has a nice ring to it." A smile crept up on my face. I don't know what this man is doing to me but I think I like it. Operative word being think.

"Nah, that one still needs to be looked at by the powers that be." He chuckles.

"Why are you up at this time anyway? Work starts in about three hours."

"I've been up since three, I had to take my mum and sister to the airport. I'm at the office now."

"They've left already? Here I was hoping to dine and wine them."

"Really? Why?"

"So they can pave the way for me into the dragons heart."

"Who is the dragon?"

"Your father." I laugh out loud. I've never heard anyone refer to my father as a dragon before. Sure he could be strict when he wanted to be but to be compared to a dragon, now that's a first.

"My father is not a dragon Makhosi." I'm trying so hard to sound serious but its really hard. In my head I'm already picturing my dad as a fire breathing dragon.

"Trust me he is. Except he is not one of the fire breathing ones, he's the unicorn version that breathes ice instead. I'm sure global warming would come to an end if they would just place him in the arctic circle and let him breathe, the ice caps would freeze again." I cant believe this man is seriously saying that about my dad.

"Keep saying that and I'll tell him then maybe he will freeze you too." He laughs.

"He can try but he won't succeed. I'm too charming."

"Wena na. Who told you you're a charmer?"

"I don't need to be told, I know."

"Full of yourself aren't you. Anyways I need to go back to work. We will talk later."

"Sure. What do they say again, oh yeah ube nosuku olufana nomuntu wakho (have a day that looks like your person)."

"So I should have a tall dark day?" He laughs. I swear his laugh transmits endorphins.

"No wena man, have a handsome and charming day."

"Right. I'm not sure about that but we'll see."

"Bye. I'll see you later." He says and hangs up.

Only after hanging up do I realise I've been swinging around with the chair. I guess love really does turn

one into an idiot. Actually it's not love yet, infatuation, definitely, love, well only time will tell.

An hour later I've done half the cat thing up I need to do. Everything seems to be in place. There is a knock on my door. I get a mini panic attack because I'm supposed to be alone here.

"Come in." The door opens and Zizo Magaqa walks in with takeaways. He isn't dressed in his chef uniform which makes him look less intimidating.

"Hi!" He says walking closer to me.

"Hello. You do deliveries now?" He laughs and places the takeaways on my desk.

"Not really. That boyfriend of yours thinks I'm his errand boy." He tries to be angry but the smile on his face gives him away. I wonder how well these two know each other.

"I take it this is still about the bet?"

"Yep. For the next four weeks I am at his back and

call." He sighs and shakes his head.

"So does that mean if I want your famous chocolate mousse cake I can get it?" He laughs and shakes his head walking towards the door.

"You and that man of yours will bleed me dry. I'll wait for his call." He leaves. Maybe Makhosi should win more bets against him, having Zizo Magaqa at my beck and call would be a dream.

The downside of running your own business is when something goes wrong. A client in Bloemfontein had their security breached, their entire system went offline after a virus was planted in one of the computers. Lucky for me they didn't do much damage. Just rendered the company offline for a hot minute but I still need to go there to assess the damage and figure out what their plan was. But I need someone I can go with. I call Pinky. She will know who is available.

"Hello."

"Pinky, please come to my office."

"Sure." Less than thirty seconds later she is in my office sitting across from me.

"I need someone to go to Bloemfontein with, who is available among the interns?"

"No one. Everyone has a project running, well except Sphetho. Maybe you can take him." Besides the fact that he is not studying IT, I can't trust him. And now that I know he is Makhosi's brother and he got this job under false pretenses makes me question his intentions by being here.

"No. Not him. If there is no one available I guess I'll go alone."

"You always go with someone when you have something to do, why won't you take Sphetho. He is a hard worker and a fast learner." That's what I'm worried about. What is he here to learn?

"He is not studying IT. Are you sure there is no one I

can still away, even for a few hours."

"Its lunchtime. By the time you get to Bloemfontein people will be preparing to leave work so you'll probably be there till tomorrow." Schucks.

"Never mind. I'll do this alone. Please book me a flight to Bloem."

"Okay. I'll send you the details." She gets up and walks out. My phone rings. Makhosi really has time on his hands.

"Makhosi."

"I've been thinking and I just realized something, we havent had sex." I pull the phone away from my ear and look at it and sure enough this really is him on the call.

"Is that really what you're thinking about at this very moment?"

"Yes. Think about it. We had sex the first time we met and now we are in a relationship and theres no

sex. Soon we will be like those boring couples that have sex on their anniversary and their birthdays. That would be a tragedy." I know I wasn't looking for a relationship when we met but did God honestly have to send a man with half a brain my way. Who thinks about sex in the middle of the day?

"I'm going to hang up now, people like us have stuffy offices to go back to. Wena you seem to be getting way too much fresh air, which is questionable with the amount of dung lying around." He laughs.

"Don't shit on my cows, one day they will pay for your lobola. Have you eaten?"

"No." I answer absent mindedly. My mind is still stuck on the lobola bit.

"Do you eat ulusu (tripe)?"

"My favourite. Why?"

The door opens and he walks in with the phone still on his ear and a cooler bag on the other. He has this

smile on his face. He hangs up and puts the phone in his pocket.

"I brought you lunch." He announces lifting up the cooler bag. He places it on my desk and opens it. The smell of ulusu hits me immediately. Theres even warm pap in there. You know how they say the way to a mans heart is through his stomach? Well that rings true even for me. Give me my favourite food and I'll love you forever.

"What are you doing here?" Stupid question Tivikele, he has already told you why.

"Disnt you hear me, I brought you lunch." He comes around the desk and helps me stand before kissing me. This feels rather weird but I love it. "Eat before it gets cold. You know ulusu is dramatic."

We sit on the couch with him watching me while I eat. I'm too focused on this meal to care. Ulusu is my all time favourite meal so he just earned himself ten points with this.

"You're pretty much when you chew." He says. I look at him and we laugh. "Anyways, when are we having sex." I cough trying to get the drink back on the right windpipe.

"What is wrong with you? We have had sex."

"Not as boyfriend and girlfriend. We need to consummate our love."

"Normal people do not go around asking for sex like that."

"Good thing I'm not normal." He leans in and kisses me. The kiss starts slow and gets intense. He leans me back on the couch and I feel his hand lifting up my skirt when the door opens. Andile is standing there like some principal who just walked into a noisy class. Heaven never loved me.

THE PLAYERS GUIDE

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Unedited ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

"How did he get in, I know I locked the door?" Lesson number one in this mjolo, I can't gossip with Makhosi. How do you ask about someone who is standing right here, next to you? Makhosi needs prayer.

"He has the password for the keypad outside."

"Really? So when am I getting it? If he has it nami I want it." He is still on top of me staring at me like we are alone.

"We'll see."

"Ah ah. See what? Nami I want it. Do you know how far I would be right now if the intruder hadn't come in?" Maybe my ancestors are trying to tell me something.

"You do realize I'm right here?" Andile says after being quiet for a while.

"And I was hoping you'd be gone by now." Makhosi answers. I need to put an end to this before it escalates to unnecessary heights.

"Ok, get off me." I push Makhosi off and he reluctantly stands up. I fix myself and stand up. "Can you give us a moment?"

"Nope. I came here for a happy ending and I'm getting it shem." He sits on the couch after fixing his pants. His bulge is quite visible and he doesn't seem to care.

"Please. Just give me two minutes." I don't know why I'm begging him, this is my office, in fact, I should throw both of them out.

"Fine. I'll go to the bathroom, when I come back you better be done." He gets up and walks out. Andile watches him as he walks out and I can't help noticing the disgusted look on his face. As soon as Makhosi is out he turns to look at me.

"Really? Of all people, him?" I walk around and sit on my chair. Until he tells me why he is here I'm not about to entertain whatever issues he has with Makhosi. "So you're going to ignore me the same way you've been for the past few days?"

"What do you want to talk about Andile?" He chuckles and sits down.

"Wow, we are cold now?"

"I'm not the weather Andile, I don't get hot or cold." I just get annoyed and angry. I finish off in my head.

"Okay. What's wrong?"

"Nothing. Besides the fact that you went and told our business to people who didn't need to know our business, and now my dad and my brother think I'm a whore."

"I said I was sorry."

"Cause sorry can erase memories right?" He sighs.

"Okay, tell me how I can prove to you that I'm sorry. But you and I both know it would have got out

anyway. My dad would have told someone."

"Really? Your traditional and conservative father would have told the world that he found his son with his head buried deep in a womans vagina? Do you seriously believe that?"

"Okay, maybe it wouldn't have happened that way....."

"The maybes and could haves really dont matter right now cause even if your father was going to tell anybody about us, you beat him to it."

"Look, I'm sorry. I'll find a way to fix this."

"Dont worry about it. There is nothing to fix. If that is all I'd like to get back to work."

"Just like that?"

"Yes, it's better we put an end to our little arrangement."

"Wow."

"Dont wow me Andile. We had a deal. Whatever happens between us stays between us. But now, thanks to your big mouth, my dad thinks I'm a whore."

I haven't spoken to my brother in a while cause he also thinks I'm a whore."

"Fine. But what about him?" He points to the door with his thumb.

"Him who?"

"Makhosi."

"Oh him, he is my boyfriend." Silence. Then he bursts out laughing. I'm not sure what joke did I say.

"Nice one, let's start again. What about him?" He stares at me and sees how serious I am. The smile fades from his face. "You're serious?"

"I am."

"You expect me to believe you have a boyfriend? You? Tivikele Nomzamo Majola? You have a boyfriend?" He asks maybe expecting me to say sike. It's all a prank. But it's not.

"Yes, she has a boyfriend. Do you have a problem with that?" Makhosi asks walking into the office. Andile chuckles and stands up. He looks from me to

Makhosi then back to me. "With him of all people." He is pointing at Makhosi who is stealthily walking closer to us. "Jozi's well known player, the same guy who has a harem of women willing to kiss his ass at the drop of a pin and you chose to be one of those women?"

"Okay that's enough." I get up from the chair so I can face him, I might be a tad bit shorter than him but sitting down makes me look too short. "I'm not part of any harem, as you put it." He laughs. I can see Makhosi is slowly getting mad. I need to get Andile out of here before these two end in blows.

"When this little fairytale you've forced yourself into comes crashing you back to earth, you'll know where to find me." He turns towards the door and unfortunately for him, he comes face to face with Makhosi's fist. He stumbles backwards and holds on to his bruised jaw. "What the fuck is wrong with you?" Makhosi says nothing. Instead he stands there with his fists bawled ready to land another punch. I quickly run and stand between them as Andile

charges towards Makhosi with his fists ready to punch too. Unfortunately for me I get there a little too early, or is it late? I dont know. I fall to the ground when I feel a sting on my cheek. It gets more painful with each passing second and the pain is now all over my cheekbone.

"Tivikele?" I hear Andile's voice ringing in my one ear. I touch my face and its really painful. That will leave a bruise for sure. I feel both of them hover over me panicking.

"Baby? Baby are you okay?" Makhosi sounds panicked. I try to open my eyes but the pain on the side of my face makes it hard. I groan in pain on the floor. I feel one of them lift me up and carry me out of the room. I know its Makhosi because of the beard rubbing on my healthy cheek. I hear Andile and Pinky call out my name when Makhosi places me on the seat of a car. I dont know which car it is but the glaring sun and pain makes it hard for me to open my eyes.

The car starts and drives off.

"Baby, hold on okay, we'll be at the hospital soon."

No no no, I need to be in Bloemfontein soon, I can't afford to go anywhere but the airport.

"Get me to the airport. I have a flight to catch."

"No. Work can wait." The car comes to a halt. The sounds of sirens tell me we are at the hospital. He gets out of the car and comes around to my side. He lifts me off the seat and carries me inside. My injured eye is probably swollen because when I try to open them I can only see from the one eye.

I'm taken to a ward with Makhosi running right next to me as if he is one of the doctors. I'm pretty sure it's not that bad, if they can just look at it then let me go I will make it to Bloem in time.

"Ma'am, I am doctor Moloi, what happened to you?"

The doctor asks. I can see him side eyeing Makhosi.

"It's nothing. I slipped and fell at work." I can sense

him mentally rolling his eyes before he writes something on the file. He touches my face a bit and I squirm.

"It doesn't look like anything is broken. I'll give you some painkillers and the nurse will bring you an ice pack. Hopefully the swelling will go down."

"So when can I go home?"

"I'll keep you overnight just to be sure everything is okay."

"I can't stay here overnight."

"Of course you can." Makhosi butts in. The doctor looks at him and I'm sure there is contempt in his eyes. He probably thinks I'm a victim of domestic violence. "If the doctor says you're staying then you are. No arguments please." I roll my one open eye and lay back on the bed.

The doctor leaves.

"Give me your phone." I hold out my hand to Makhosi and he hands me his phone, unlocked. I call Pinky.

"T.N.M Technologies, Pinky speaking how can I help you?"

"Pinky, its Tivikele."

"Oh my God, are you okay? Where are you? Do you need me to call the police?"

"One question at a time. Yes I'm fine, I'm at the hospital and no, you dont need to call the police. I need you to get one of the senior engineers and an intern and get them to Bloemfontein as soon as possible."

"That's already been done. Phumlani and Sphetho are on their way to the airport right now. I know you said you didn't want Sphetho involved but I was desperate." Argh, I guess beggars cant be choosers.

"Okay, thank you Pinky, I'll talk to you later."

"Alright. I'll send your things home."

"You're a God send."

I hang up and lay back on the bed. The nurse comes in and hands me the painkillers. She walks out again

and the nasty look she is giving Makhosi makes me laugh.

"You do realise they think you beat me right?" I say as soon as the nurse walks out. He sits on the bed next to me and holds my hand. He brings it up to his lips and kisses it.

"I'm sorry. I know I started this, this is all my fault and I'm sorry."

"It's not your fault. I should have spoken to Andile before today."

"Maybe, but that doesn't excuse the hooligan behavior that just happened. Look at your pretty face, that idiot will pay for this." I feel myself getting groggy, the meds are taking over.

I woke up to a dark room. But the room I'm in is a little more comfortable than the one I fell asleep in. I look around and thanks to the little light coming in

from the window, I know I'm in my bedroom. I get up and switch the light on. I should have just switched on the side lamp cause this light is blinding. I quickly turn it off again and open the door. I walk out with my eyes half closed towards the kitchen. The smell of something cooking meets me halfway.

I see Makhosi through the half opened eye since the other one seems to be still swollen.

"Hey, you're up." He says when he sees me. He helps me sit up on the highchair. "Are you hungry. I made uphuthu namasi (sour milk/inkomazi)." That explains the smell.

"Thank you. I'll eat. How did I get home?"

"I drove you here. You dont remember getting discharged?" I shake my head. "Its okay, I guess the meds are really strong. How is your eye?"

"A bit painful, still swollen but I'll live." He takes out a card from his pocket and hands it to me. "What's this?" He chuckles.

"The doctor slipped that into your pocket. He thinks I'm abusing you so he, I guess wanted to make sure you know there is help."

"Oh. That's nice of him. Thanks."

"I'm sorry you had to go through that. I shouldn't have punched that idiot."

"Its fine." He hands me the bowl with uphuthu and amasi. I take a spoon and it's nice. Shem, yena he can cook. Okay maybe I'm jumping the gun a bit, its inky uphuthu. Anyone can cook that.

"You're not one of those people who put sugar in amasi, right?" He asks and the look on his face is one of pure disgust. I laugh.

"No. I don't." He sighs.

"Thank God. Let's go to the lounge." He helps me down and we cuddle on the couch with him feeding me.

"How did we get in the house?"

"Pinky. You need to give her a raise. She works way

too much."

"I know. I was actually planning on giving her some shares in the company for her birthday."

"Really? That's nice."

"Yeah. She's been a huge part of the company."

"Look at you. Stubborn as you are you're still a teddy bear deep inside." I chuckle and roll my eyes.

He gets up and goes to the kitchen to put the bowl away. He comes back with my meds and hands them to me. I drink them and less than thirty minutes later I'm out like a light.

♡♡♡♡◇◇◇♡♡♡♡

I woke up in the morning to a note on the pillow next to me. Makhosi had to go and do some work but he promised he'd be back. And to make sure I don't go to work he took my car keys. I guess he hasn't heard

of uber or bolt. But I'll let him think he's in charge. Besides, my bruised eye wont let me be. I guess I'll have to work from home today.

I got my phone and called Phumlani, I need an update on Bloemfontein.

"Sister boss." He sounds chirpy at five in the morning.

"Did u wake you?"

"No. I've been up since three."

"Oh. Why? Did you find something?"

"I did actually. The virus started in the Finance department. From the looks of things someone was trying to wipe out literally every trace of work they've been doing."

"Why would anybody want to do that? Unless they are trying to hide something."

"My guess is the audit that's coming up. Someone is clearly trying to hide something."

"Shit. Is everything back to normal though?"

"Yes. I guess whoever planted that virus didn't know about the back up system you put in place. The system was immediately restored since the security was able to contain the virus and everything was restored back in the system."

"So the audit will go on?"

"Yes. I spoke to Mogapi this morning and he is pushing the audit up. He is so impressed he is giving us a bonus."

"Impressive. Well done. Tell me something, is Sphetho with you?"

"No. He just went out to get some breakfast."

"Okay so we can talk. How is he? Like is he working hard and what not."

"He seems like a good kid. He works hard and he is a curious person. Always asking questions and wanting to learn."

"Nothing suspicious?"

"No. Just the usual curiosity."

"Okay. Thank you. I'll expect an update when you get back."

"No problem. Goodbye."

I still dont trust Sphetho but everyone seems to have good things to say about him which is good. But I'll still keep an eye on him. I get up and go to the bathroom. My eye is a little less swollen than it was yesterday so maybe it by tomorrow it will be completely healed and I can atleast cover it with make up. I get in the shower and I'm done in ten minutes. I get out and dry myself. I get back in my pyjamas and head to the kitchen. My phone rings and Andile's name pops up on the screen.

"Andile?"

"Hey!" He seems shocked that I picked up. Maybe he wasnt expecting me to answer. "I'm downstairs. The security wont let me up without your permission. Can you let me up, we need to talk."

"Sure. I hang up and call the security desk. A few minutes later there is a knock on the door. I'm not even going to try and hide the bruise. I open the door and his jaw is on the floor when he sees me.

"I'm so sorry!" He says looking at my bruised eye. I leave the door open and wait for him to come in. He does and I can see him rub his hands together. "I'm really sorry."

"It's fine. It's done."

"Can we talk about this?"

"There is nothing to talk about. We had what we had, it's over now so we can both move forward without any issues."

"I don't want to lose you. You're my best friend." He seems rather hurt almost.

"We can still be friends, but that's where it all ends. We can't be anything more than that."

"If that's what you really want then I can't fight you on it. But just know I still love you and I'll always be

here for you." He walks over to me and gives me a hug. "I'm sorry I punched you." He kisses me on the top of my head and like he mist he walks out the door and doesnt look back.

As soon as the door closes I feel a ping of guilt. I care about him, even though his father has been trying to get us together I dont think we would have ever got to that point. When it comes to him, logic and lust worked very well together, but now my heart has taken the wheel and I want to see where this ride takes us. Bad or good, Love is a journey, right?

THE PLAYERS GUIDE

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Unedited ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

I'm beginning to think my ancestors and God are trying to tell me something. Almost a month in a relationship and still no sex. How does that even happen, it's not like we are on some 'ninety day rule' thing. We seem to get disturbed at every turn. If it isn't emergencies at work, its people showing up to either my place or his unannounced. Maybe this is a sign, I just need to figure out of what. You can't honestly tell me that when I had no boyfriend I could get dick anytime I wanted, and now I have a man but I'm getting none. This must be some twisted joke that's being played on me.

I knocked off work and went to the mall to get a gift for Thobile. Her wedding is in a few days and we are

hosting her bachelorette party. Some of her cousins and sisters are coming then we'll drive down to Cape Town for the weekend. Even though she was against it at first we were finally able to convince her to do the party. Who passes up an opportunity to see oiled up naked man gyrating on you.

I got to Pick n Pay and looked around for a wedding gift. Well I already have some custom made, engraved gold knives for her. But you can never have enough champagne flutes so I grabbed a set of six. They have a bit of gold on them too so they are perfect. I did a bit of grocery shopping for my place. I'm beginning to slack on the cooking. I need to get back on my healthy lane or else the bridesmaids dress wont fit me.

I decided to grab some wines too, you know a house can never have enough wine. Just as I turned the corner to the wine aisle I saw Kevin standing there with a bottle in his hand. I have been ignoring him for

a while now and I'm not ready to explain myself so I just turned the trolley around and walked away. Wine will have to wait.

I went to the spice aisle and picked up some spices.

"You cant ignore me forever, you know." His voice sounded behind me. I closed my eyes a bit and asked God why he has forsaken me. I opened them again and turned around. He stood there with a smile plastered on his face. I know I have a boyfriend and shouldn't be doing this but this man is fucken handsome. He is the perfect mixture of black and white. He has on formal pants with a baby blue shirt tucked in and formal shoes. His smile is the perfect art piece inside his beard. Shem, it's a pity he's now off limits since I have a boyfriend now.

"Kevin, what a nice surprise." He smiles and looks away. My guess is he probably saw me earlier.

"It is isnt it. So how have you been?"

"I'm okay. Just busy."

"The business is growing?"

"By leaps and bounds. Its tiring and frustrating sometimes but it's worth."

"I told you entrepreneurship is a long hard road, but with persistence it is worth it."

"I see it now. Anyways I should get going, I need to get ready for my trip."

"Trip? Where are you off to?"

"Cape Town for Thobile's bachelorette." He laughs. Him and Thobile have a love hate relationship. She pretends she doesn't like him but deep down I know she cares about him.

"I feel for the poor guy."

"Yeah, but so far I think he can handle her."

"So, how about a meet up later?" Lord Jesus please do not lead me into temptation.

"About that. I think we need to put a full stop to our little arrangement." I dont know why I'm nervous, it's

not like I haven't been planning this for a while now. But Kevin is sweet and I don't want to hurt him.

"Oh, why is that? What happened?" He seems more concerned than anything.

"Well, I kind of have met someone."

"Oh, that's nice."

"Yeah, I'm not sure where it's going yet but I want to see how it will pan out."

"Heartbreaking, but I'm happy for you."

"Thanks."

"I'll pray for him." I laugh and he joins me.

"Wow, am I that bad?"

"No. You're great. He is a lucky guy. So I'll see you around?"

"Yeah."

We said our goodbyes and went our separate ways.

That was way more civil than when I parted ways with Andile. But I guess I deserve one good thing to happen to me. I got what I needed, paid and went home. I packed my weekend bag and waited for tomorrow to come. My phone rang.

"Simphiwe."

"Cherry ka Makhosi (Makhosi's girlfriend)." These ones have found a way to make a joke of me being someone's girlfriend.

"Very funny. So what's happening with Thobile's sisters and cousins?"

"Everyone has confirmed. They will drive to her house early in the morning and then we will head to the airport together. Zanele and Nonto will fly from Durban straight to Cape Town."

"Okay. Then I'll see you tomorrow morning."

"Yes. So tell me, are you still going through a dry spell?"

"Yeah." She laughs.

"How do you have a dry spell with a man?"

"I dont know. I'm starting to think the universe is conspiring against me."

"Make a plan moghel. Or maybe you'll get some in Cape Town."

"Mxm. Apparently the first rule of mjolo is getting dick from another person other than your partner is prohibited."

"And here I was thinking you're a rule breaker."

"Not today satan. You will not tempt me." I hang up with her laughing on the other side.

I woke up early in the morning and took my shower. I sent Makhosi a good morning text. Yes, apparently I send good morning texts now and it feels rather normal and nice. I got dressed and drove to Thobile's place. It was already buzzing with some of her, cousins, sisters and other friends. Simz was

busy with a clipboard trying to make sure everyone was accounted for. Once she was sure we were all here she led us out and there was a quantum waiting for us. Two in fact.

"Really Simphiwe? A Quantum?" One of Thobi's snobbish friends asked. I'm not sure which one it is cause she has some very snobby friends. No I'm not being judgemental, it's a fact. I have my snobbish moments but I also know when to tuck the snob in me away and keep it locked.

"It's got four wheels and it will take us from point A to point B."

"This has to be a joke. I should have just let my husband drive me." Another one chimed in.

"Why are y'all acting like you've never been in a taxi before? You wont even be in there for an hour tops. So let's go please before we miss our flight." I said and got in the Quantum. Thobi and her sister Siyabonga followed and the rest of the ladies had no

choice but to follow suit, mumbling and complaints and all.

We got to the airport, boarded our flight and off we went to Cape Town. When we got there we found a sprinter waiting for us. I laughed when I saw the reactions of the girls. I swear Simz is on a mission to piss people off. We were driven to the Casa Mia guest house. It's beautiful and huge enough for everyone. I picked my room and called Makhosi. His phone went straight to voicemail. Mhmm. It's too early to panic so I'll just give him a few more hours. I mean he hasn't even responded to my morning text.

"Babe, we are going out for brunch, let's go." Simz said walking into my bedroom. I got up and changed into a dress and some sandals. We got out the guest house and found two Mercedes Benz viano's waiting for us. That one was a better alternative for the girls. We got in and drove to Waterfront and had out brunch. In my head I was already overthinking, why

wouldn't Makhosi answer my calls or even reply to my texts. I've sent him a few more after the morning text and he still hasn't replied.

After brunch we were driven to a private beach where there was a picnic laid out. I swear Simz should consider this as a part of her business, this trip was planned to the tee and everything is the way its supposed to be. We changed into white bikinis and swimsuits printed with 'bride squad' right on the beach before we had a photoshoot.

In the evening Simz planned for us to have a lingerie party. We changed to champagne coloured silk pyjamas with our names printed on. The drinks and food were flowing. Lucky for us we had the guest house all to our self. My phone beeped from the charger and Thobile's cousin brought it to me while I was standing out on the balcony making up scenarios in my head about where Makhosi could be and what could have happened to him. I was a bit

tipsy. I didn't even look at the caller ID.

"Hello."

"Sthandwa sam." I heard his voice on the other end. I should be happy right? But I'm pissed.

"Ufunani Makhosi (what do you want?)"

"I want to see you." I chuckled a bit. You know it's true what they say about alcohol and emotions not being a good combo. It felt like the alcohol made me more angry at him.

"Really? Too bad, I'm in Cape Town. And I'm glad you're in Joburg because I don't know what I'd do if I had to see you now."

"Let's find out."

"What?" Does he really think I'm going to shout at him over the phone?

"I'm outside."

"Outside where?"

"The guest house you're in. Come and scream at me

if you want." He hung up the phone.

I march out of there like a mad woman ready to attack. I stand on the pavement and look up and down the street. There are a few cars on the street so I'm not sure which one he is in. I see a car start and drive towards me. With my arms crossed and foot tapping on the ground I stand there ready to explode. He pulls up next to me and opens the door. I get in and face the front. He starts the car and drives a bit further down the street. Angry as I am I'm not about to throw the first punch.

"You're upset." That's the first thing he says. Isn't he supposed to be grovelling and begging for forgiveness? I'm not saying a damn thing until he apologizes. And by the looks of it, it will be a long night before I get those words. And until I hear them with my own drunk ears, it will be silence of the lambs on this side. "I'm sorry." He says. Really? I don't have any plan B. What do I do now? "I know I

have been offline the whole day, there was an emergency at the farm, our water supply was poisoned, our cows would have died but my brother noticed that the dogs who rushed to drink where the cows drink literally died a few minutes after drinking so we spent the whole day trying to figure out where the problem was before letting the cows out. And then we had to find alternative ways for the cows to get water, it was just a whole mess. I'm sorry."

I knew it. There had to be a good reason. Yesss. I threw myself at him.

"I knew it." He holds me and chuckles after the shock has worn off.

"What did you know?" He asks when I let go of him and sit back down.

"I knew you had a good reason for ignoring me." He laughs.

"Really, you were fuming just a second ago." I roll my eyes.

"Mxm whatever, so how did you know I was here?"

"You told me you were coming to Cape Town."

"No I mean here, the guest house?"

"Oh Simphiwe told me." That sneaky girl.

"So you figured you'd come here just to see lil old me?" Good thing its night time or else he would see the blushing mess that I am.

"This is Cape Town baby not Timbuktu. Come here." He pushes his chair back and I straddle him.

"So vele vele you were mad?" He asks his hand already under my pyjamas.

"No. I dont get mad."

"Right!" He pulls me close to him and he plants kisses on my chest on top of the pyjama top.

"So is everything Okay at the farm now?"

"Yep. We know who poisoned the water supply and my brothers are busy trying to deal with that. The police are involved now so we will wait and see what

happens."

"That's good." His hands leave my back and he unbuttons my top.

"Do you see where we are before you do what you're planning on doing?" He cups my boobs in his hands and sucks on one. I keep looking around expecting someone to show up but no one is there and I can feel myself getting wet. I hold his face in my hands and kiss him. He lets go of my boobs and his one hand goes inside my pants. I feel his thumb on my clit and I bite my lip trying to keep my moans in check.

"Makhosi!" I have my hand resting on the roof of the car while the other one holds on to the seat to keep my balance. Makhosi's thumb has made way for his two fingers that are going in and out of me. "Baby, we cant do this here?" I keep looking around. This is a street afterall. He lifts me up and puts me on the passenger seat again and pulls my pants down and

off of me. I guess we are doing this here and now.

He pulls down his track pants and his dick comes springing out. I kneel on the seat and take his dick in my hand. I move my hand up and down a bit before replacing my hands with my mouth. I spit on his tip before swirling my tongue on it. His moans fill the car making me nervous. But as good as that feels with him inside my mouth, I need him somewhere else.

I let go of his dick and straddle him again.

"Where are the condoms?"

"Why?" I can feel myself going from a hundred to zero. I hope for his sake this is a joke.

"What do you mean why?" He smiles and reaches into the glove compartment and brings out a sealed pack of condoms. I tear the plastic and open the box. I take one out and tear it apart before slipping it on his dick. He runs his dick on my throbbing clit. I grind

on him waiting for him to insert himself inside me.

I grind on him for a while before he slips inside me. I bounce on him like Faith Nketsi when she's twerking on stage. Okay I can't twerk to save my life but I know what I'm doing. And his moans and groans tell me I'm on the right path. He lays the seat flat and watches me ride him. He moves his hand to my clit and runs it while I move on him. I don't know why I keep expecting us to be interrupted. He lifts himself up again and holds on to my waist. He twists and turns till I'm under him.

He lifts my legs up till my knees are adjacent to my face. His strokes start slow. With my legs lifted up like that he seems to reach every nook and cranny inside me. He ups the speed and pumps into me, hard. I feel my body ready to give in. He pumps harder and faster.

"Let it go baby." He says in between strokes. I guess

that's the push I needed because my body let go. A few strokes later and he groans and releases. He keeps going for a while before he slumps on top of me trying to catch his breath. I guess we've officially consummated our relationship. In a car. Either I really love this man or I need Jesus.

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Unedited ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

The only thing I hate about weddings is when the single women get asked when they are following suit. You'll have old people telling you they are getting old and they want to see you in a white gown, but ask them when will you see them in coffins and you're deemed disrespectful. Mxm, old people and their double standards.

Today is Thobile's white wedding, her traditional wedding happened last weekend and my girl looked like a dream. I'm pretty sure even today she'll be stunning. I've seen her wedding dress and she looks stunning in it. But if you ask me, I'll take traditional attire any day.

I walked back into the hotel room we are using to get ready. My make up and hair is done, all I have to do now is put my dress on. Simz is busy going up and down at the venue making sure everything is up to standard. She's too much of a perfectionist but I guess that's a prerequisite in her line of work.

"Hey, where have you been, I'm starving." Thobi says holding out her hand. I hand her the McDonald's packet. She immediately starts eating and the makeup lady looks at her funny. I would too if someone had just messed up my work of art. But it's just lipstick so she'll survive.

"So how are you feeling? Nervous, excited?" I sit down in front of her and we share the food.

"I don't know hey, I guess cause this is just a formality it's a little less nerve wracking."

"What happened to the food Smangele brought you?" She looks at me and rolls her eyes.

"It's in the bin. After what happened last weekend, I'm a little more cautious."

"Understandable. Finish up so we can get ready. I know brides are supposed to come late but we respect people's time." She laughs.

"Relax, we will be on time. Besides, a few minutes never killed nobody."

We finish eating and I help her into her dress. Her mermaid gown hugs and accentuates her curves in all the right places. The smile on her face as she looks at herself on the mirror is a sight to behold. I find myself wiping away a few tears. Simz walks in and closes her mouth when she sees Thobi.

"Oh my friend. You look like a dream." We all stand there looking in the mirror. Mxolisi is one lucky son of a bitch.

Simz and I put on our dresses while Thobi gets her make up touched up. As beautiful as this gown is I cant help wondering what Makhosi will think when he sees me. Yes, I invited him to the wedding. He sent me a text a few minutes ago saying he was

here already. I hope none of those horny single women out there make a move on him or else I'll stab someone.

Thobile's mom walks in followed by her aunt and her Smangele. I'm not sure what it is about death and weddings that seems to bring out the worst in people but what we witnessed last week is nothing short of a plot in a Nollywood movie. I'm surprised Smangele and her mother are even here. But family right, apparently there is no trash bin available to throw them in so we have to tolerate them.

"We'd like to talk to Thobile please, alone." Her aunt says. Simz and I look at each other then look at Thobile. The look in her eyes is enough of an answer for me. I'm not going anywhere.

"I'm sure whatever you want to say to her you can say it with us present." I take a seat on the bed looking at them. They stare at me for while before they turn to Thobile.

"Thobile?" Her aunt starts.

"Aunty, they are not going anywhere so say what you need to say."

"MaMlambo, you're going to let her talk to me like that?" Her aunt turns to her mother. This woman and her daughter are on a mission. Hell will freeze over before they succeed.

"Say what you want to say Joanna, we have a wedding to get to." MaMlambo answers. She is way too nice for her own good. I don't even know why she allowed them to come in here. Joanna sighs and turns to her daughter. Smangele brings out a small gift bag that she was holding behind her the whole time. Simz and I look at each other, and almost like telepathic twins we get closer to the little group and stand on either side of Thobi.

"We wanted to give you this." She hands Thobi a small jewellery box. Simz grabs it from Joanna's hand before it makes it to Thobi. "That's not yours." Joanna snaps. Simz opens the box and smiles.

"How cute." She turns it over to show it to us. It's a gold necklace with a pendant. I'm pretty sure she bought it from those cheap Indian shops but we will pretend its eight carats.

"I was hoping you'd wear it today." Joanna says with a hopeful smile on her face. Simz, Thobi and I exchange looks. I can see the fear in Thobile's eyes. I don't blame her though. After last weeks mess, I cant blame her.

A couple of weeks ago when we were in Cape Town for Thobile's bachelorette party, Smangele was there too. For the whole weekend she kept trying to give Thobile food. And everytime Thobile would be called to take a photo or see something, Thobi is not that big when it comes to food. As a chef she will cook, but eating is not one of her priorities. So she'd end up forgetting to eat the food Smangele served her. And since we ate most of our lunches and suppers in restaurants it was easy for her to eat with us all at the same time. And for some reason Smangele would seem pissed off when Thobi didnt eat the

food. We didn't take much notice of it until last week when we were in Soweto for the traditional wedding.

On Saturday morning, just before Mxolisi and his family came over to do the much needed necessities, Smangele made breakfast for Thobile. Soft porridge with peanut butter and milk. For starters whoever eats peanut butter in soft porridge needs therapy. It's the same as people who eat inkomazi (sour milk) with sugar. Smangele handed Thobile the bowl, and just as she was about to take the first spoon she smelt the peanut butter and then pretended to be on the phone with her fiancee. I went to the kitchen and dished up more soft porridge for Thobi and made sure it was the way she liked it, with Rama and sugar. I took Smangele's porridge and threw it in the bin. When she came back in the room and found Thobi eating her face lit up, it was almost like she had won the lotto. Throughout the ceremony she kept looking at Thobi as if she expected something to happen. Red flags went up when she asked Thobi during the ceremony if she was feeling okay, was her stomach

hurting and all these weird questions. Only then were we able to connect the dots. She was up to something. Whatever it was though, we would not let it succeed.

"Let me help you put it on." Joanna said walking closer to her.

"Actually she can't. Atleast not for the ceremony. For the reception perhaps." I answered.

"Who are you to tell her that." Smangele snapped. I'm pretty sure she was angry.

"It's not that. As you can see she already has a necklace on, but we will make sure she wears it for the reception." Simz puts on the biggest fake smile on her face but that doesn't stop the looks Joanna shares with Smangele. MaMlambo on the other hand is just clueless. We should have told her about our suspicions, instead of telling her uncle. Clearly he didn't pass on the message. But it's too late now. Anything we say will only make her run rampant. We have to control the situation as much as we can.

"Why cant she wear the necklace now?" Smangele asks. "Mum was just trying to do something nice for her niece."

"And I appreciate it. I really do, but like Simz has said, it will go better with my reception dress. Besides nje, this necklace I'm wearing, my dad gave it to me and its special. I just want to have a piece of him when I walk down the aisle."

"Hawu Joanna can we let her do what she wants. If she says she'll wear your necklace then she will. But right now time is not on our side. We need to go. Let's go." MaMlambo leads everyone out leaving the three of us standing there like statues.

"Yho, the devil works hard but that woman works twice as hard." I clap my hands once.

"Tell me about it. I'm going to flush this."

"Wait, what if aunt Joanna wants to see me wearing it?"

"Hell will freeze over before you put this on your neck." Simz disappears into the bathroom and a few seconds later the toilet flushes. She comes back and hands Thobile her bouquet. She looks at herself on the mirror one last time before we walk out.

We walk down the aisle, at the Munro Boutique hotel's garden 9to the sounds of Celine Dions 'How does a moment last forever'. Even though there is a band, the lead singer is doing justice to the song. As I walk down the aisle with the song ringing in my ear I cant help noticing the decor. The Ghost chairs filling up the garden are the perfect way to make the garden and the view of Joburg to stand out. I know I say this a lot but Simz is a boss in the decor department.

I get to the end of the aisle and stand across a nervous Mxolisi. He keeps popping his knuckles. If I didnt know him as an arrogant someone this would be concerning, but right now it's funny. I nudge Simz

behind me and we chuckle. The band starts singing Ed Sheeran's 'Perfect' and Thobile walks down in her brothers arm. She looks amazing, and everyone stands to watch her. Except for one set of eyes that are glued on me.

I take my eyes off Thobile and find Makhosi starring at me. I knew he'd come but seeing him just sends butterflies floating all over my tummy. I smile and he winks at me. The music stops and brings me back to the present. I focus on the couple in front of me as they promise each other forever. Their vows are short and sweet but emotional.

Reception time. Thobi wanted to party and Simz made sure to deliver. The reception area looks like a club. Once all the speeches are made and the aunt shows her disgust at not seeing her necklace on Thobile's neck, the party begins. But I have to check on my man before anything else. I look around the room searching for him, I see him at the back of the

hall busy on his phone. I walk towards him and wrap my arms around his waist and he kisses me on my forehead.

"Did you miss me?" I ask staring up at him.

"Do you know how much torture it is to see you in that tight dress the whole day and I can't even hold you?" I chuckle and bury my head on his chest.

"Well I'm yours now. For about twenty minutes though."

"Works for me. Let's go."

"Where are we going?"

"To my car."

"Nope. I'm not going to the car. Let's go upstairs to the bridal suite." I say dragging him out.

"Wait, isn't that disrespectful for the bride and groom? We can't be using their room before them."

"Relax. They have the honeymoon suite already set up for them. The bridal suite was just to get ready."

"Okay then, let's go."

We head up to the bridal suite hand in hand. We open the door already kissing and with our hands all over each other. As soon as the door closes he lifts me up and I wrap my legs around him. Good thing this dress has a slit. He pins me against the wall and moves his lips down to my neck. He is way too slow for my liking and we have a reception to get back to. I unbuttoned his shirt and pulled it out of his pants.

"Hey, slow down. What's the hurry?" He asks as he pulls his head away from me.

"We have a reception to get back to. Have you forgotten." He chuckles and kisses me again. He unzips the dress at the back and then puts back down on the floor. He pills the straps down my arms and the dress falls to a puddle next to my feet. He lifts me up again and puts me on the bed. I watch him as he gets undressed. He's clearly in no hurry

cause he is slow, on purpose. Clearly I'm the only one who missed him.

"Really. What's with the torture." He laughs and takes off his pants. He gets on the bed and unbuckled the strapless bra I'm wearing before pulling down my underwear. He pulls me down to the edge of the bed and turns me around. With my chest on the bed and my ass up in the air I feel him go in. I hold my breath until I can feel him all the way inside me. I grab the sheets as he starts moving in and out of me. With his hands on my waist he directs his shaft into every corner of my body. I pull a pillow and bury my moans in it. His hand leaves my waist and travels to my clit. He rubs on it while giving out some deep strokes.

He slows down on the strokes and goes harder with his finger on my swollen nub. I feel my peak getting close each time he runs on it. I scream as my orgasm hits with him still inside of me. I feel my knees getting weak and all I want to do is lay down.

But now with this one clearly not done with me. He pulls out of me and turns me around to face him, missionary style. He leans down and kisses me while going back in again. He starts on his slow strokes again while muffles my moans with his mouth.

His strokes gets faster and he pulls out of the kiss and focuses on the strokes. He stops again and stares at me. I look up at him and the expression on his face is foreign to me. I dont think I've ever been looked at like this before. Oh maybe I was too focused on the strokes to notice.

"I love you." He says after what feels like a minute. I feel my heart beat start racing. I want to say the words but they seem stuck in my throat. I keep staring at him till he starts his strokes again. He keeps going till I feel myself reach my peak again. My body convulses and he joins in too. I feel his warm seed inside me before he slumps on top of me.

I hold on to him while he is still inside me.

"I love you too." He raises his head and looks at me.

"What did you say?" He asks with a smirk on his face. I blush and look away. He holds my face and brings me back to face him. "I'm waiting." I chuckle and blush some more. I swear if I was any lighter I'd be red right now.

"I said, I love you too." He smiles and kisses me again. And then he stops. "What?"

"I think we need to get you cleaned up a bit and then get to the pharmacy." I frown.

"Why?" He looks down at our joined private parts then looks back up at me.

"I think the condom just broke." Oh shit. I push him off me and sure enough the condom is ripped. Whatever was inside of it is now inside me. Oh God.

I quickly rush to the bathroom and get in the bathtub. I pull down the showerhead and direct it straight to

my vagina and open the water. The smart and educated woman inside me knows that what I'm doing is not gonna work but the panicking me will do just about anything to make sure I dont get pregnant.

"That's not going to work. Let's go to the pharmacy." He walks in already dressed. I get off the tub and dry myself.

"How did the condom break?" I ask while going back to the bedroom. I'm over the panic and now I'm getting mad.

"I dont know. And theres no point in pointing fingers now, let's just go to the pharmacy and get the morning after pill."

"Or maybe this was your plan all along. To get me pregnant." He chuckles and shakes his head.

"I know that's your panic talking to I'll let it slide. Let's go."

I finish getting dressed and grab my phone. We walk

back down to the lobby and instead of going to the reception which is clearly still on going we get into his car and drive to the nearest shopping complex or mall. He drives to Mall of Africa and we rush to Clicks. The anxiety I have right now refuses for me to even say anything. We get to Clicks, get the pills and head back to the hotel. I drink a double dose of the pills just to be sure.

We get back to the hotel and join the party. Lucky for us I didnt miss much. But just as I settle down the MC says it's time for the bride to throw the bouquet. Simz being Simz decides to push me to the centre of the single ladies crowd. I dont even know what the fuss is about this bouquet thing but I'll play along. The crowd starts counting down, I take a few steps back till I'm at the back of the crowd alone. The girls in front of me seem too pumped about this while thing. Thobile throws the bouquet. Like some slow motion scene in a movie the bouquet comes straight to me and Lando right at my feet. I'm not about to pick it up. I walk away and sit down. Simz quickly

picks it up and puts it in front of me.

"You cant run away from your destiny. I'll be planning your wedding soon." She says and walks away. I need to start a 21 days fast cause this ain't happening. Nope. Not gonna happen.

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Unedited ♡ ♡ ♡ ♡

FIVE MONTHS LATER

The past five months have been nothing short of a fairytale. Thobile is happy in her marriage, Simz is pregnant with my first God child, Makhosi and I, well so far so good. Sometimes in the past few months I've asked myself why I've been so closed off when it comes to love cause it's not like I've never been hurt that bad. But as they say, its better late than never.

This weekend will be spent with Makhosi. Like most weekends, if he is not at my place I'm at his. I never thought I'd ever get to a point where I can spend time with a man and not feel some type of way about it. But things change right? I finished up

working and drove straight to the mall for some groceries. I know Makhosi won't have any since he spends most of the week at his family farm so he won't have time to go to the mall.

I did my shopping and immediately rushed to his place. I know he isn't here yet so I just used my key. Yes, I have a key now. I'm a real girlfriend. Lol. I unpacked the groceries and packed everything away. I put the rice and the potatoes on the stove, good thing I brought more meat cause defrosting would take forever. I decided to take a shower while everything boiled in the kitchen. I finished with my shower and put on one of Makhosi's shorts and a vest. Yes I have clothes here but his are more comfortable, the perks of having a boyfriend.

I went back to the kitchen and continued with my cooking. In less than an hour everything was done, except the beef stew that was still simmering. I texted Makhosi and he told me he was on his way. I

got Netflix ready to go, plates ready to dish up and then threw myself on the couch. I was busy with my social media when he walked in. He came over to the lounge and leaned over the couch and kissed me.

"Something smells nice in here. What did you make?"

"Just rice and beef stew with some salads on the side."

"Nice. Let me go take a shower then I'll join you. Pick a movie in the meantime." He kissed me again and walked to the bedroom.

I went to check on the food and the meat was ready. I dished up and took everything to the lounge. In ten minutes he was done and he joined me in the lounge.

"So, how was your day?" He asks with a drink in his hand.

"So so. The Joshua software is finally up and running. It's been a week and there's been no glitches so I'm hopeful. And Joshua wants to introduce me to

some of his business associates."

"Really? So you're officially going international?"

"Hopefully. Fingers crossed."

"Well, you deserve it. You work hard."

"How are things at the farm?"

"Good. The guy who poisoned our water has a court appearance in a few days. And we have a couple of cows that are ready to give birth, any day now."

"That explains the smell of shit when you came in."

He laughs and gently elbows me.

We finish eating and clean up. We come back and focus on the movie while chit chatting about anything and everything. I lay on his chest while he recites the farm shenanigans. Judging by the stories he tells me all the time, I swear he runs the live version of the animal farm book. There is always drama there.

His phone vibrates on the table but he ignores it. It rings again and he still ignores it. When it rings the third time I take it and hand it to him.

"Just answer the phone and get it over with." I say handing him the phone. He takes it and answers. I dont hear the other side of the conversation, the only thing I hear that sends sleep running from my eyes is him saying he will be there in a few minutes. He hangs up and I can already tell this weekend is off to a horrible start.

"What's wrong?" I ask cause he is silent.

"Uhm... I have to go back to the farm. One of the cows is about to give birth." I get off him and sit up.
"I'm sorry, I know I said this weekend would be....."

"Its fine, you can go."

"Babe."

"Its fine really. I'm tired anyway so I'll just sleep."

"I'm really sorry."

"Makhosi!"

"Okay. I'll be back as soon as I can. I promise." He gets off the couch, puts on his shoes and kisses me before walking out.

I watch the movie for a few more minutes before deciding to go and sleep. I switch the tv off and make sure all the lights are off then go to the bedroom. Of course there are clothes scattered all over the floor. Makhosi is lucky he gets the whipped version of me otherwise these clothes would be in a dumpster by now. I pick the clothes up and carry them to the bathroom. I go through the pockets before putting them in the laundry basket. I go through the sweat pants and find something. I take it out and it's a phone. One of those cheap Samsung smart phones.

I throw the pants in the basket and take the phone back to the bedroom. There's about seventy WhatsApp notifications, and from the looks of it they are all from a WhatsApp group. I know the rules are

that you should never go through a man's phone but what do you do when you see your name being spoken about in spaces you know nothing off?

I get on the bed and open the phone. Lucky for me there is no password. I first go through the photos and there is nothing but memes and gifs. There are a couple of pictures of me even. There is a couple of them where I'm sleeping and some of them I'm in the kitchen cooking or laying on Makhosi on the couch. My antenna immediately goes up when I see a pic that Makhosi took of me sitting on the bed, with just a towel around my waist, my back to him and I'm topless. My head is tilted to the back smiling at him. I remember that day. I was getting dressed and he sneaked in a picture of me. Ok that should not be a problem except the pictures are on a WhatsApp file. I figure there is no point in me obsessing over this when I can get the truth right here, right now.

I decide to open the app. Sure enough the messages are from a WhatsApp group. There are only six contacts on the phone. And all six of them are on the WhatsApp group. They are all guys, I've met some of them judging by their profile pictures. But some I don't know. I go to the group and search the media. All my pictures are in the group. The pictures of me on the phone are on the group. From the looks of it they were sent. The last pic is the one of me with the towel. I feel my heart start racing. Why in heavens name would he send my pictures to his friends?

As much as there aren't any pictures of me fully naked but still. There are pictures of me sent to this group for whatever reason. I decide to read the messages so I can get some context of what is going on. I scroll up until I get to the first message on the group. From the looks of it the group was started six months ago.

Six hours later I've cried, dried my tears and cried some more. I feel like such an idiot. The phone is now on the bed and I'm sitting there with my knees up to my chest. I'm holding them close to me with my chin resting on my knees. My tears have started again. This is not how this was supposed to play out. This is not how love is supposed to play out.

At four AM he walks through the door. In my head I've been practicing what to say to him, but now that he is here, seeing him just breaks my heart even more. The lights are off except the side lamp so he cant see the tears running down my face.

"Babe, why are you still up? Its almost morning." He walks over to me and sits on the bed. I cant even bring myself to look at him. "Baby?" He holds my chin and lifts my face up to look at him. A few hours ago the concern on his face would have been so heartwarming. But now, now I know the truth. I know

it's all a lie. "Baby, what's wrong? Why are you crying?" He brings me in for a hug but I just feel suffocated. I pull back and get off the bed. "Tivikele, what's going on?" He asks his eyes following me around the room.

I turn the lights on and open the closet. I take out my overnight bag and throw it on the bed. I take my clothes out and throw them on the bed too. I can't see his face but I can sense the confusion he probably has. I turn around with my clothes in my hands and come face to face with his chest.

"Baby, kanti what's going on? You're worrying me now." He tries to hold my arms but I take a step back and his hands fall to his sides. "Baby, what did I do?" I swear men deserve Oscar's on a daily basis. The concern and breaking voice, top tier acting. I finish packing with him looking at me and saying nothing. I close the bag and turn to look at him.

"Congratulations." I'm trying so hard to not let the

lump in my throat spill out.

"For what? Baby, please tell me what's going on." He says walking closer to me. I take a step back and he stops.

"Its been six months, I guess now that's what, six, seven hundred in the bank?"

"What are you talking about?"

"I guess I should be fluttered. I'm worth that much."

"Tivikele?" I take the phone and throw it at him. I'm surprised he still hasn't noticed it sitting on the bed.

Realization sets in when he sees the phone on the floor. He slowly bends down and picks it up.

"Baby its not what you think." I chuckle and shake my head while blinking away the tears. I've cried enough for tonight.

"So you didnt make a bet with your friends to sleep with me for atleast six months? You didnt agree to them paying you a 100k each? You havent been sending your friends updates every couple of weeks

with pictures to boot to show that you and I were still 'together'?"

"I can explain."

"No need. I read the messages. It's all there. Clear as daylight. All this, it was all a lie."

"No baby, I promise you, none of this was a lie. Yes it might have started that way but....."

"But what? What? You suddenly fell head over heels in love with your mark? Thats what I was right? Your mark? All you had to do was make sure I ended up in your bed, just for six months and you'd be smiling all the way to the bank." I chuckle and cross my arms on my chest. "And like an idiot, I fell for it, hook line and sinker. I believed you." He throws the phone on the bed and unzips his top, he takes it off and throws it on the bed too.

He sits down and runs his hand over his head.

"Can I atleast explain?" He says his eyes on the wall.

"Explain why I'm an idiot? No need. I already know. I

just have questions." He turns to me, hope written on his face, as if me asking questions will automatically make me forget.

"Ask me anything and I'll answer you. I swear."

"Why me? You could have had any girl you wanted, so why me? Was I an easy target?"

"No of course not. You walked into the club at the wrong time that's all."

"Wrong time for me but right time for you?"

"Baby, I'm sorry, I know how this looks and I know I dont deserve your forgiveness, but I swear I never meant to hurt you."

"So what was the plan after the six months? You get the money from your friends then what happens to me? Do we break up and you go back to your life? Do we pretend to be lovey doveys again? What?"

"I don't know, all I do know is that I love you, and I know I should have told you this earlier but I was afraid I'd lose you. Tivikele, i know in the great

scheme of things this is not how things should have played out but I love you, I really do and I would give an arm and a leg to make this thing right but I know I cant, and this is not how I wanted you to find out about this."

"So how was I supposed to find out? How?" Silence. I grab my overnight bag and my handbag together with my keys and my phone.

He follows me to the lounge calling out my name. He quickly rushes to stand between me and the front door, stopping me from leaving.

"Can we talk about this and resolve it. Ngyacela Macingwane, just let me explain and make this right." He pleads, so sincerely I almost believed him.

"You know what's worse about this whole thing? It's the fact that you made me believe you, you watched me fall in love with you knowing that you dont feel the same way, you watched me bare my heart and soul to you knowing that I was wasting my time." I

feel tears trickle down my face. I've tried to be strong through this but right now I'm failing, dismally and I don't care.

"I'm sorry."

"You could have told me, I would have played right along, whether you needed the money or not I would have gladly played along, maybe, but I guess now we'll never know."

"I'm sorry okay, just let me fix this, please."

"If you really want to fix this you can start by moving from the door and letting me go." He sighs and slumps his shoulders in defeat.

He stands aside and opens the door. I wipe my tears and walk out. I don't feel the door close behind me, I walk to the lift blinded by my own tears. I get down to the parking lot and get in my car. It takes a while for me to get the keys out of my bag and it takes me even forever to start the car. I drive out of the complex crying. A part of me was hoping he would deny it, tell me it was a misunderstanding, but how

would he deny a truth I already know.

I keep driving with no clue where I'm going. I just know I need to be as far away from Joburg as I possibly can be. I don't think I can be in the same area code as him. But I don't have the energy to drive all the way to Durban. I find myself driving to Pretoria, to Mabutho's place. I get there just when the sun is out. I call him when I'm at the gate and he doesn't pick up. I call again and he picks up. I tell him I'm outside. The gate opens and I drive in.

I find him waiting for me by the door.

"Okay, whose ass am I kicking?" He asks as soon as he sees my puffy red eyes.

"Can I sleep. I'm tired." He cups my face in his hands and I look up at him. And for some reason seeing his concern opens up the floodgates again and I just cry. He brings me in for a hug.

"Okay, I'm sorry, what happened?" He holds me in his arms and I just bowl my eyes out. I feel like such an idiot more than anything. I forgot every rule I had and I allowed myself to fall in love, I put all my reservations aside just to get played. Love is a scam.

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Unedited ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

I thought people who warned others and told them it will end in tears when it comes to umjolo were just jealous, but now I know they were right. I've exhausted every drop of tears that I have. I'm sure even the reserve tank of tears is depleted, but somehow my heart is still shattered. Isn't crying supposed to make things better?

I've been holed up in Mabutho's place for what feels like an eternity. I haven't left the bed and I'm pretty sure I've taken one shower since I got here. But I don't care. Maybe if I'm lucky I'll evaporate into the bed and disappear from existence.

The door opens and someone walks in. I know it's

Mabutho even though I cant see him. I have the duvet over my head cause I cant stand the light. I'm better off in the dark, just like i was better off when i ddint know i was part of a wager. I hear whispering but i dont hear what they are saying, but now I know it's two people. I dont even care really they can do whatever they want and then leave me alone.

Someone sits on the bed and before I can even say anything they pull the duvet off of my face. I close my eyes and hide from the sunlight before I can even see who dares disturbs my peace.

"Can you please just leave me alone." I snap with my eyes still closed.

"Really?" My mums voice cuts through the fog of darkness I've created for myself. "I can still whoop this ass, just cause you're going through stuff doesnt mean you can talk to me any which way you want." I sigh and sit up on the bed. For the first time in a week I sit on my ass. I've been tossing and

turning. Even when Mabutho tried to force me to eat I would take one bite while laying on my side.

"I'm sorry. What are you doing here anyways?"

"Your brother is worried about you. He says you've been here for a week and you haven't said anything to him. You don't speak or eat properly. What's going on?"

"Nothing is going on ma."

"Okay, so why are you here and not at your house or your boyfriends place?" I clench my teeth and a bout of anger bubbles up inside me. But I know I can't release that anger on the person in front of me.

"Makhosi and I broke up."

"Oh!" I can see the confusion in her eyes. I know until I tell her everything she'll be on the fence about it. She's spoken to Makhosi a few times and she has a soft spot for him. And that's another thing that makes me angry. Not only did I let him into my life and my heart I opened the door for my family to

know him and love him, well not my whole family just my mom and sister but still, it meant something to me.

"What happened? Did he cheat?" For some reason I can sense the wheels rolling in her mind. She might be an accomplished neurosurgeon but deep down she is still a mother and she is overprotective. "I know someone who can rough him up a bit, even break a couple of bones. Just say the word and it will happen." She says. Any other day this would make me laugh but I've ran out of laughter bundles.

"I thought you liked him?"

"I do. But I love you. You're my baby and seeing you hurt like this hurts me, which makes me hate the person who hurt you." I chuckle a bit and play with my hands. As much as I would like to deal with this all on my own but to avoid the endless questions about him I need to tell her the whole story.

By the time I'm done narrating everything to her she

is pacing up and down the room. She is angry, I can see the steam come out of her ears. The only sounds coming out of her mouth are mhmmms and nothing else. I'm not sure where her mind is but I know she is up to something. I should try and stop her, but I have zero energy. She stops pacing and walks back to the bed and sits down.

"Listen, I'm going to make you some food, and I'll bring some ice cream too, I hear it's good for heartbreak." She says a fake smile plastered on her face. I sink back on the bed and she covers me with the duvet. She walks out and closes the door quietly. I know when my mother has an ace up her sleeve, and right now she has the biggest one, and whatever she does, I really don't care.

A horizontal line of 20 black dots, with the 10th dot from the left highlighted in white.

NARRATED

At Makhosi's club, the Black Lounge, he is sitting in the VIP area with his friends, Zizo, Ndalo, Tshepo, Jobe, Lubanzi and Melokuhle. Drinks are flowing and the conversation is flowing. All of them are in the same city for the first time in months. It's not just a celebration of them reuniting but they are also celebrating Makhosi's 'win'.

Makhosi is not in the right space of mind. Although his friends are drinking and joking around, his head is not here. He can't stop thinking about Tivikele. He knows he hurt her, he knows chances of him getting her back are zero to zilch. But there is a small piece of him that's hoping she'll forgive him and they can start over again.

He downs his glass of whiskey and gets up walking out of the VIP section. He goes outside and lights a cigarette, a habit he quit four years ago. But now it's the only thing that's calming him down. He leans on

his car and puffs in the nicotine. His friend Ndalo stands in front of him.

"For someone who is 600 thousand rands richer you dont seem pleased." Ndalo says looking at his friend. He has been paying attention to him since the night began and he has noticed that he is not himself. Makhosi shakes his head and throws the cigarette on the ground before stepping on it.

"I fucked up man. I really did this time."

"What did you do?"

"Tivikele found my other phone, she red everything we were talking about in the group."

"Shit!" Ndalo answers taking his hands out of his pocket and running them through his head. "Man that's bad."

"Yeah, she's hurt, and angry, I cant blame her though."

"Understandable. But why does it sound like you are more hurt than she is? Do you have feelings for her?"

Makhosi shakes his head and lights another cigarette.

"I love her." Ndalo chuckles.

"Dude, I know we wanted to see you with the same person for atleast six months but we didnt say anything about love."

"Yeah well the heart wants what it wants."

"This is a first. Well second but still. Anyways, what are you going to do about it. You do know chances are she'll never forgive you?"

"I know. But I have to atleast try and get her back. She's everything I could ever want in a woman. Sure the chase was nice, but it somehow made me see her beyond the strong fearless person she projected to the world. I want her back." Ndalo sighs and leans on the car next to Makhosi.

"I hear you brother. But you know getting her forgiveness and trust back will be an uphill step

battle?"

"I know. But I have to try. I can't just give up. Not like this."

"Well if that's the route you want to take, I'll be right next to you. I'll support you, whatever you need, I got you."

"Thanks man."

"Now let's go back inside, who knows when we'll be together again. Let's go have fun, then tomorrow we will draw up a plan to get you your girl back." They walked back into the club and for the first time in a week Makhosi joined in on the conversations and the laughs, Ndalo has given him a bit of hope, he wasn't sure what that meant but he was willing to see where it goes.

Meanwhile in Pretoria, Tivikele is still holed up in bed. Her sister, Bahole and her father landed a few hours ago and are now in Mabutho's house at the command of her mother. Mrs Majola dishes up for everyone and then takes some food to Tivikele. After

giving her her food she walks out of the bedroom. She stops by Mabutho's room when she hears him arguing with his girlfriend.

"Seriously Mabutho, I'm tired. Your sisters been moping in that room for a week now and now the entire village of Mgungundlovu has filled up my lounge. When are they leaving?" She asks, clearly unimpressed by the uninvited guests.

"This is still my house too Crystal and you cant ask me that. I dont complain when your family is here so please."

"My family is not loud and obnoxious. My son cant even stay here with all the noise around here."

"I dont have time for this. Mum said dinner is ready so if you want to eat you'll come and eat." Mrs Majola quickly walks away when she hears footsteps coming to the door.

She sits down at the table with her family and

Mabutho joins them.

"So why are we here?" Gcinile asks the question everyone has been thinking off. Afterall they were ordered to show up here, no questions asked.

"Finish your food first. We have to go somewhere." Mabutho and Gcinile look at each other and shake their heads.

They finish their food and clean up. Mrs Majola leads them out and they get into two cars. They drive to The Black Lounge. Its almost eleven o'clock, the place is packed, it is a Friday afterall. They park the cars and get out. Mrs Majola opens the car boot and takes out a sjambok and hands it to Mr Majola.

"Manje? Siyempini na? (Are we going to war?)" He asks looking at the sjambok. Mrs Majola takes out another one and hands it to Mabutho, another goes to Bahole and another to Gcinile. She takes out her own and closes the boot.

"Lalelani ke, (listen), when we get inside there, shoot first and ask questions later." She says rolling the sjambok into a circle in her hand.

"Hhaybo ma, people get arrested for this, we cant just go in there without any idea what's going on." Bahole says.

"If you love your sister then you'll do this. If you dont, get in the car and go back." She says looking around.

"That's emotional blackmail." Gcinile mumbles.

"Then stay in the car." Mrs Majola says and walks towards the entrance of the club.

The others look at each other and follow her. They hide the sjambok from the bouncers and in they go. Mrs Majola looks around but she doesn't see Makhosi. She goes to the bar and asks the bartender where he is. The bartender shows her to the VIP section. She thanks him and walks there with her husband and kids behind her.

"This is a nice celebration." She says walking in. Everyone turns to look at her. Makhosi sees her and stands up and walks closer to her.

"Ma, what are you doing here?" He asks her. He sees the rest of the family behind her and instinct tells him this is not good.

"Are you celebrating your win?" She asks. Makhosi swallows and takes a step back creating a decent amount of space between him and her.

She frees the sjambok from its coil and sends one whip flying. It hits Makhosi on the arm, shocking everyone. His friends stand up ready to fight. Ndalo, the peacemaker in the group walks forward and stands between Mrs Majola and Makhosi.

"Ma, I dont know what's going on but this is not the time or place for this." He says. "Ets just....." before he can even say anything more the sjambok makes contact with his skin. He takes a few steps back and joins his friends who now huddled up in the corner.

There is only one exit in this section and right now its occupied by Mabutho and Bahole.

Mrs Majola charges in and starts whipping anything in sight. Mr Majola and Gcinile join her.

"Ungjwayela kabi wena (you take me for granted.)" She shouts. The commotion inside has stopped the music and now everyone is watching. The VIP entry way is now filled with patrons who are watching. The guys are in the corner screaming and shouting. The bouncers are struggling to get through the crowd.

"Mina ngzala ingane wena ubone umpopi wokdlala, (I give birth to a child and all you see is a doll to play with.)" She shouts. Zizo pushes his way out between the three but comes face to face with Mabutho and Bahole who are waiting for him. He decides to brave the whips and push his way out.

The bouncers finally make their way into the entrance and they grab Mabutho and Bahole. Makhosi and his friends see an opportunity and they

push past Mr and Mrs Majola and fight through the crowd and run out.

"Nizonya zinja." She shouts behind them. The bouncers rush back after taking Mabutho and Bahole out of the club. They try to get their hands on Mrs Majola to get her out. "Ngzokshaya unye mina (I will beat you up)." She says pointing the sjambok at the bouncer. The fire in her eyes makes the bouncer take a step back.

"Ma, I don't know what's happening but you can't do this here. You have to go cause the police are on their way." He says. The three walk out to whispers and phones in their faces. They get outside and find Mabutho and Bahole standing by the car. They all get in the different cars and drive back to Pretoria in silence. They go into the house and throw themselves on the couches.

"Okay ke ma, explain. Why did we have to do that?" Bahole asks.

"That idiot broke your sisters heart." She tells her everything that Tivikele told her which fuels the family's anger even more.

"You should have told us before we went there. And you should have given us guns." Mr Majola says.

Tivikele wakes up from her sleep to go and use the bathroom. When she comes back she finds her phone with a whole lot of notifications. She opens one and it's a few tweets with videos of her family attacking Makhosi and his friends. She opens and closes her mouth in shock with every clip she sees. She gets off the bed and puts her shoes on. She rushes out only to find her family in the lounge catching their breath.

"What did you do?" She asks looking around the room. Gcinile lifts her sjambok up and shows it to her.

"Nobody messes with one of us and gets away with it. We did what we had to do." She answers. Tivikele

sits down on the arm rest of the couch next to her father. She knows her family is overprotective, and even though she had her suspicions that her mum was up to something, nothing could have prepared her for this. She bursts out laughing.

"This is not a family it's a Mafia." She says looking at her mother. Her mother just shrugs.

"Salut." Gcinile says lifting up her bottle of water.

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“Are they gone?” Tshepo asks his friends while they are hiding behind the club. Melokuhle peeps on the corner to see but all he can see are patrons. The club is back on party mode, and the sounds of the police sirens are getting close.

“I can’t see anything.” Melo answers coming back to his friends. Everyone is busy nursing their bruises and broken egos. Makhosi is sitting on an empty crate of beer looking at the whip mark on abdomen.

“This is what you get for dating gangsters.” Lubanzi says. His friends agree looking at Makhosi. He looks up and sees all the eyes on him.

“Don’t look at me like that, this was all your plan.”

“Mxm, whatever. I need to go to the hospital, I hope to God those sjamboks don’t leave scars because if they did my career is over.” Tshepo says.

“Shame, that six pack will never be seen again?” Ndalo says mockingly.

“Hallelujah!” The guys say in unison. Tshepo just rolls his eyes and nurses his wounds.

A bouncer comes to the back of the club with the police behind him.

“Bozza the police want to talk to you about what happened tonight.” He says before turning around and leaving. The two detectives look from one guy to the other trying so hard to keep their laughs in check.

“So madoda, do you want to press charges?” One detective asks.

“Yes, and I want to sue.” Tshepo says standing up to stand in front of the police.

“No one is pressing charges.” Makhosi shouts. His

friends turn to look at him.

“Are you nuts? Did you see what just happened? Those people need to pay for this.” Lubanzi chirps in. “No. One. Is. Pressing. Any. Charges.” Makhosi says through gritted teeth.

“No one is pressing charges officers.” Kobe, whose been quiet finally speaks. The cops nod their head, say their goodbyes and leave.

“Your ass is paying for my medical fees.” Tshepo says.

“Guys let’s just go home, clearly this night is dead.” Ndalo says.

“I’m going to get the alocohol. I need it now more than ever.” Zizo says and leaves followed by Tshepo. Lubanzi, Jobe and Melokuhle follow them leaving Ndalo and Makhosi alone.

“So, that was a ninja move.” Ndalo says. Makhosi laughs.

“I cannot believe they did that. The fact that her mother was the one leading the troupes is quite laughable.”

“True. But that also means if you really still want Tivikele back in your life, your chances just went from 0 to negative one hundred. You’re screwed.”

“I know. But I can’t give up. I need her in my life and I can’t just let her go.”

“Dude, you do know now her entire family hates you? Even if she does forgive you you’ll still have a mountain to climb when it comes to her family. They are not just going to forgive and forget because now they know what happened and why you two broke up.”

“I don’t care how long it takes or how many mountains I have to climb but I’m going to get her back. Even if her family hates me, I don’t care. I love her and I need her in my life. If their hate is something I have to live with for the rest of my life then so be it.” Ndalo sighs and stands up from the ground he is sitting on.

“Okay then. I’ll support you but I don’t see this working out. But I’ll still be by your side.” Makhosi gets up and hugs his friend.

“Thanks man. Let’s go before those fuckers finish the alcohol.” They laugh and head to the front of the club.

They find the others already waiting by the cars and they get in and drive to Centurion, to Makhosi’s place.

TIVIKELE

I’ve always known my family wasn’t normal, but what they did tonight will go down in history as the most gangster move they’ve ever done. We’ve been in the lounge of Mabutho’s place laughing about this. They keep replaying everything for me and I hate that I wasn’t there to see it live. The videos on social media aren’t doing this whole thing any justice.

It's almost morning and we haven't slept. Having my family here made me forget about Makhosi, being able to focus on anything else other than my stupidity is something I'll always be grateful for. Eventually at the crack of dawn we all retired to sleep. My parents used the guest room and Bahole used the room I was sleeping in, so Gcinile and I had to sleep in the lounge, on the floor.

"So vele vele it's over?" Gcinile asks just before we sleep.

"Yep."

"Do you love him?" I turn to look at her. Why would she even ask me that?

"That's besides the point Gcinile. How I feel doesn't matter, it was all a lie anyway."

"What if he has fallen in love with you, before you answer think about it, the man spent six months with you, I'm sure somewhere somehow feelings got involved."

“For me maybe, for him, I doubt it. I guess I should have seen the red flags early, I mean the man went to all kinds of lengths to be with me, all for a bet. I wonder where my instincts disappeared to.”

“At least you had six months of fun and love.”

“If I could I’d erase every memory I have of him. I hate that as angry as I am my heart still hasn’t got the memo.”

“The heart wants what it wants huh?”

“Yeah well it will have to learn to live without what it wants.”

“I’m sorry sis.” I sigh and turn around to sleep. I feel her hands go over my waist and her on my back. She’s spooning me. I smile and drift off to sleep.

I woke up to someone banging pots and plates in the kitchen. We slept less than three hours ago and someone is already up and waking the rest of us up. I get up and find Crystal doing only God knows what in the kitchen.

“Do you mind!” I say and she turns to look at me, I’ve known her long enough to know she is annoyed right now. I wonder what happened.

“It’s eight o’clock and you’re still sleeping, in the lounge even, what if we have guests come by?”

“So you figured you’d wake us up like we are in prison?”

“I want to clean my house so please wake your sister up. Speaking of houses, when are you going back to yours?” Oh wow.

“I’ll go back when Mabutho tells me to.” She chuckles.

“Well he won’t, but I am. I think it’s time you went back to your house and while you’re at it, take your family with.” Again, wow. So not only am I not welcome in my brothers house, even his own parents aren’t welcome either. Now I understand why Mabutho still hasn’t proposed to her.

“This explains a lot. But what you need to know, this is my brothers house, I am a Majola, Mabutho is a Majola, what’s your last name again?” She clenches her jaw in anger. “Exactly! Until you become Mrs Majola, you’ll just have to deal with Mr and Mrs Majola senior and you’ll have to deal with us too.”

“Enjoy it while it lasts. This is not a hotel and you won’t come and go as you please.”

“Mxm.” I leave her there and go to the bathroom. I pee and come back to the lounge and get under the covers. I get my phone from under the pillow and there is a tonne of messages from my friends, there’s notifications from insta and Twitter, people love news, I’m just glad the whole bet thing won’t make it to social media, I hope.

I put my headphones on and play some music then drift off to sleep. Crystal and her banging pots will not stop my sleep.

I wake up a few hours later to the smell of the most

delicious beef stew, yes my mother makes the best beef stew, I'm yet to meet anyone who makes it better than her. I take my headphones off, I'm surprised they are still in my ears. My dad and Bahole are watching soccer and Gcinile is in the kitchen with mum.

“Good morning.” I greet my dad and Bahole.

“More like good afternoon. How did you sleep?” My dad asks.

“Okay. Why didn't you wake me up?”

“You needed the rest. I almost carried you to the bedroom but then I remembered you're not so little anymore.” My dad says making me laugh.

“Well I'm going to take a bath, I think it's time I went back to my life, I can't hide out here forever.” I pack up the blankets and take them to the bedroom.

When I go past Mabutho's room I see him sitting on the bed busy on his phone.

I take the blankets and pack them in the closet. I go back and knock in Mabutho's room before going in. I sit down next to him on the bed.

"Hey." He looks up and smiles but the smile doesn't reach his eyes. "How are you?"

"I should be asking you that. You're the one with a broken heart remember?" He says pinching my cheeks.

"Well I'm asking you."

"I'll be okay, don't worry about me."

"Tell your favourite sister what's wrong?" He laughs.

"I don't know man, I'm not sure what's happening with Crystal, these days she's....."

"Bitchy!" I finish for him.

"You've noticed it too?"

"Well she did ask me this morning when I'm leaving."

"She what? She has no right to ask you that." He says with a horrified look on his face.

“Well she does live here and if she’s uncomfortable it’s not fair on her.”

“It’s not about fairness, when her parents were going through whatever drama they had her mother stayed here for an entire month and I didn’t complain. You’ve been here a week and she’s already asking you when you’re leaving? This is why I say there is something going on with her and I’m getting fed up about it.”

“Well you two need to talk and figure out what’s going on with her. Anyways I’m going back to my place today.”

“You don’t have to do that.”

“I know, but it’s time I went back to my life. I can’t hide away forever.”

“I guess. But just so you know, this is home too, and if you need to disappear and recharge, I’m here and I’ll take care of you.” He side hugs me and I lay my head on his shoulder.

I leave him and go take a shower. I finish and put on some jeans and a T-shirt. I put my sneakers on and pack my bag. It's weird how my things still smell like his perfume. I shouldn't have kept them in his closet. I finish packing and join the family for a late lunch. We eat and then Mabutho and I drive the family to the airport. Mabutho is flying out today for work. I didn't see Crystal when I left but I'm sure she'll be happy we're out of her house.

After dropping the family off at the airport I drive back to my place. I'm sure my house thinks I'm dead. I get my bags out of the boot and head up to my apartment. I open the windows just to let some fresh air in cause it's stuffy in here. I open the closet to pack my stuff away and I come face to face with his things. I sigh and try to muster up some courage and decide what to do with his things. The petty girl in me wants to start a bonfire with them but the mature girl says courier them to him. I don't know what to do so I close the closet.

The doorbell rings and I go and open. He is standing there like he is lost.

“Hi!” He says after a while of us having a staring contest. I swear the devil is trying to kill me.

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“Can we talk?”

“We have nothing to talk about.”

“Please, just let me explain.” Men really do think their words are full of magic and sprinkles. All they have to do is speak and the fairy dust that comes out of their mouths solves everything. And then I remembered, we might not have anything to talk about but he definitely needs to take his shit out of my house. I open the burglar door and walk to the bedroom with him following behind me. I turn to look at him with my arms crossed on my chest.

“Look Tivikele i know how bad this is and I have no words to tell you how sorry I am. But the truth is yes, how this started wasn’t on the best note but I love

you, and I want to make this right. You're the most important person to me and I really don't want to lose you." I chuckle and turn, I walk to the closet and take everything out that belongs to him. I throw his clothes and shoes and they pile up on the floor. He looks at them and looks up at me.

"You can take your stuff and get the fuck out of my life."

"I don't want them." He's looking straight in my eyes like he is trying to read my soul, and for some strange reason I feel a tad bit uncomfortable with his stare.

"Fine, I'll just start a bonfire with them." I threaten.

"If that's what will make you feel better then do it. Heck if you want to break my windows or break my knees I'm fine with it." This one thinks I'm joking.

I leave him there and go to the kitchen. I get a refuse bag from the drawer and head back to the bedroom.

I fill it up with his clothes and shoes. It's a bit too small for all his stuff so I go back to the kitchen and get another refuse bag. I fill it up too and drag it out to the front door with him watching me. I get a lighter and a newspaper with some paraffin.

He follows me as I drag the bags down to the braai area. I find a braai stand far away from people and apartment windows. I fill it up with his clothes and throw the paraffin on it. I turn to look at him with the lighter ready in my hand.

“Are you sure you don’t want your things?” He shakes his head with his hands behind his back. I light the lighter and start the fire. His clothes go up in flames, and instead of watching his stuff burns he looks at me, I’m not sure what the expression on his face is but it sure doesn’t seem like he is hurt. But I don’t care.

“Now there is nothing connecting us. Goodbye.” I

turn to walk away and I can feel him watching me.

“I love you Tivikele, you might not believe it now but it’s the truth.”

I walk away with his words on repeat in my head. I want to believe him, I really do, but how do I know this is just an extension of the bet he has with his friends, how do I believe him when I have lost trust in him or anything that comes out of his mouth?

I get back to my flat and find my friends waiting by the door. Immediately when they see me they give me a hug, a group hug. We stand there with me in their embrace and I can feel myself getting emotional again. I pull back and plaster a fake smile on my face.

“Let’s go inside.” I say leading the way in. I throw myself on the couch and they follow suit.

“How are you feeling?” Simz asks. I shrug my

shoulders.

“I’ll live. It’s not like I’m the first girl to get played.”

“Yeah but that doesn’t mean it hurts any less.”

Thobile says holding my hand.

“Argh, it’s life. We live and we learn.”

“Okay, the time for a pity party is over, get up.” Simz says standing up.

“What’s going on?”

“We are going clubbing, we need to remind you who you are.” She says.

“By taking me to a club? How does that make sense? And have you seen the time? It’s still daylight.”

“Tivikele, I know you were head over heels in love but if that made you lose yourself then it’s time to get you back.” I roll my eyes and sit back on the couch. I’m not sure what she is up to but I don’t like it, at all.

“Okay, tell you what, instead of a club, let’s go have lunch somewhere. We will figure out if club hopping

will be possible from there.” I am hungry and I could do with some food.

“Fine. I guess I can eat.”

“Perfect, let’s go get you ready.”

We go to the bedroom and my friends pick out an outfit for me. We talk and we laugh and for a moment I forget about my broken heart. When we are done we head out looking like a million dollars. We drive to our favourite restaurant, which also happens to be Zizo’s restaurant. Only after we walk in and are sitted do I remember that he is technically speaking an enemy right now. But he does serve the best food so I’ll just have to suck it up. I can’t have him ruin this for me, I love food and I won’t just stop because I don’t like him.

The waiter takes out order and comes back five minutes later with an expensive bottle of wine. A wine we did not order.

“We didn’t order that.” I say before the waiter walks away.

“Uhm, I know, it’s the chef’s special. We give it only to the chef’s guests.” He says. My friends and I look at each other.

“We are not the chef’s guests, we are here on our own accord.” Thobi tells him.

“Eish sisters, I’m just doing my job, I was just told to take care of you as the chef’s guests, anything else beyond that is not for me to know.” He says and walks away. Zizo must be on crack if he thinks I’ll drink his food for free, I will pay for my food and I will order what I want.

I get up and take the bottle of wine but my friends hold me back and I sit down.

“Where are you going?” Thobi asks.

“To give him back his wine.”

“Don’t even think about it. If he wants to wine and dine us then we shall be wined and dined. And I’m

about to order the most expensive thing here." Simz says looking through the menu. When she finds what she is looking for she lifts her hand up to get the waiter's attention. The poor guy walks to us probably scared as hell.

"Are you ready to order?" He asks nervously.

"Yes please. We will have the seafood platter with cavier on the side, beef steaks, chicken wings and we added dessert. If Zizo wants us to eat we will eat. We ordered more drinks and had the time of our lives. When it was time for us to pay Thobi just told the waiter to put our bill on Makhosi's tab since he has a running one here. He has 600 thousand so he can afford it.

Our lunch turned into a dinner and dinner turned into a night of dancing and partying. I don't usually drink to drown my sorrows but just for tonight I need to forget. I need to get into my house and not see his image everywhere or smell his cologne all over the

house. I just need a bit of a break.

By midnight I was on the dance floor drunk as fuck and gyrating on some guy I'd met there. We were getting close and he was fun to be around. The drinks were flowing and the music just made everything even better. He whispered in my ear and said he was leaving and we can continue the party where he stays. Perfect. I looked around for my friends and found them at our table. I stumbled to them and got my bag.

"Guys, I'm leaving." The both looked at me and got their own bags.

"Okay. Let's go." Thobi said.

"No it's okay, you can stay if you want."

"Who are you going with?" Simz asked.

"That guy." I answered with a grin on my face pointing at the guy. He lifted his drink up and smiled.

"You're not going anywhere with that guy, not as

drunk as you are." Thobi says.

"I'm not drunk, tipsy maybe but definitely not drunk."

"Okay, let's talk about this outside." Simz says. We settle the bill and walk out.

When we get to the car the guy I was dancing with comes behind us.

"Are you ready to go." He asks. We turn to look at him.

"She's not going anywhere with you." Simz says.

"I wasn't talking to you." The guy says.

"Well we are talking to you. She's not going anywhere with you." Thobi reiterates.

"Sweery." The guy says ignoring my friends. I'm too tired to even argue. Simz opens the door for me to get in and the guy holds my arm pulling me to him.

A scuffle breaks out with the guy trying to pull me to him but my friends are now in between us trying to

free me from his hold. There's some shouting and screaming going on but I have zero energy to even get in on whatever is happening. Eventually Simz pulls my arm away and shoves me into the car then closes the door. The arguing continues but the voices continue to drift away until I hear nothing at all.

“Dear God, please free the little man hammering in my head. I don’t mean to be rude but it hurts. I promise if you do this one thing for me I’ll quit alcohol, well partly, I’ll just take a sip once every other month, no week, okay maybe every other day. But please free me from this mess. Amen.”

By the time I was done with my little prayer I had to rush to the bathroom and empty whatever contents was in my stomach. I sat down on the cold tiles and laid my head on the toilet seat. Thank God for my cleaning lady otherwise this would be disgusting.

“This is what you get for drinking like alcohol is going on a lockdown.” Simz says standing in the door. I try to look up and I can see through my red eyes that she is drinking tea or coffee. She has a smirk on her face. I don’t understand how she looks like that while I look like I just got out of hobo magazine.

“Coffee please.” She hands me the cup of coffee and I gulp down the strong brown liquid. But it’s exactly what I need. I take a few sips of the hot liquid and instead of it calming my stomach it just makes me throw up some more. I hand Simz the cup and continue my business. I just pray I don’t vomit my intestines as well. Simz walks away laughing. Who needs enemies when you have Simz.

I finish throwing up and take a shower. A cold one. I finish showering and go back to my bedroom. I put on a short and a T-shirt and head to the kitchen where Thobi and Simz are. When I get there I find

Pinky has joined the party. I greet and take a seat on the barstool and lay my head on the counter. And because I have the most amazing friends in the world, they start banging things around making my headache worse.

“OKAY! YOU HAVE MADE YOUR POINT PLEASE STOP!” I shout over the noise. They laugh. Idiots.

“We told you to stop gulping down alcohol like it’s the end of the world.” Thobi says.

“Thank you for your concern, all I need now is a greasy breakfast to help me with my painful hangover.”

“And I got you.” Thobi says and places a plate of grease in front of me. Immediately the smell of the eggs mixed with the bacon and sausage sends my nostrils on a dizzy spell and I feel my stomach churning. I rush to the bathroom and throw up like never before. But because I have nothing in my stomach all I throw up is air. I think I need a doctor.

I go back to the kitchen and these girls aren't even going to pretend to be concerned about me. I sit down and try to eat again but the smell is just horrible. I push the plate away and lay down on the counter.

"Shem, I almost feel sorry for you. But I don't. When are you coming back to work anyway?"

"Soon, I hope."

"Well you better make it very soon, the company won't run itself."

"I know, I know."

"Are you sure this throwing up isn't something else?" Simz asks. I lift my head up and look at her with my one eyebrow cocked.

"What's that supposed to mean?" I ask. I don't miss the look that's shared between them.

"When last did you have your period?"

"It should come any day now."

“Are you sure?” So now I have to prove to my friends that I have my period? I take out my phone and direct Pinky, who is sitting next to me to the app I use to track my cycle. She takes long to answer so I look up again and my phone is now with Thobi and she’s looking at it, shock and bewilderment on her face. I grab the phone and look at it. According to this app my period is late. And not just an hour or two late but four weeks.

This can’t be happening right now. If this means what I think it means, Dear God, why have you forsaken me.

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Unedited ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

This cannot be happening. It just can't. I have too much on my plate with work, getting pregnant is just not an option, especially with Makhosi's child. How will I explain to my child that they are a product of a 'bet'? How do you even begin to have that conversation? I was embarrassed enough having to tell my mother and now I'll have to explain the same story to a child and to make things worse, I hate that mans guts.

I've been pacing up and down this hospitals waiting room, I drove here as soon as I saw the app saying I missed my period. I refuse to believe this until a doctor tells me and I hear a heartbeat on a sonogram screen. Until then, there is no baby

growing inside me. I refuse to believe that.

“Pacing won’t make the time go any faster Tivikele, sit down.” Simz says. Yes they are here, they decided to come with me, I’m sure they are just here to say ‘we told you so’. As much as I need to deal with this on my own I know they won’t let me, and fighting would just be futile. I take a seat but I keep tapping my foot on the carpeted floor. Thobile places her hand on my knee stopping my tapping.

“Don’t stress okay, it will be okay, we are here and you won’t have to do this alone. We got you.” She says making me a bit emotional. I’m not even sure there will be anything for me to do alone.

The patients keep being called in one by one until there is one left. I’m just hoping there will be a doctor available to see me today because I did not make an appointment. And walk ins are always attended to last unless it’s a life and death situation.

A nurse comes in and calls the last patient. My heart starts racing, I say a silent prayer asking God to just let this be a bad dream.

Finally a nurse calls me saying a doctor can see me now, not my usual doctor but a doctor nonetheless. My friends and I walk into his office. I'm not sure I'm comfortable with a male gynaecologist but I'll just have to deal with that later.

“Ladies.” He says getting up from his chair. I see he has my file in front of him. “So who is my patient?” I raise my hand up like I’m in class afraid to say the wrong answer. And my friends are pointing at me. “Okay then, please have a seat.” I take a seat and Simz sits next to me holding my hand. Pinky and Thobile stand behind me. “So what seems to be the problem, I see here it says you think you might be pregnant.”

“Uhm.... yeah, although I’m sure it’s just alcohol poisoning cause we had a rough night last night, so

that could explain the vomiting. Right?" I am so desperate for him to say I am not pregnant. That's all I ask for, if God can give me that I'll praise him till The end of time.

"Okay, let's not speculate. Let's get the test done see if we can't rule out a pregnancy then we'll discuss the alcohol poisoning afterwards." I nod my head and he hands me a tiny cup to pee on. He shows me the bathroom. I get in and pee in the cup. When I'm done I wash my hands in the sink and just look at my reflection on the mirror in front of me. I'm not sure I recognise the person in front of me, I used to be so strong and fearless, and then I allowed myself to love and my entire life came tumbling down. And right at this moment, there could be a human being growing inside me. It's just one heartbreak on top of another. How much more can one person take.

I wipe the tears streaming down my face and prepare to hear what my future holds. I take the cup

and walk back in to the doctors office. I hand him the cup and sit down. He places the strip inside the tiny cup and I hold my breath. I hold Simz hand and squeeze the life out of it as the two strips appear.

“Okay then, as you can see, it’s positive. You’re definitely pregnant.” I could have done this myself at home but I came here hoping for something more concrete than a stick in a cup of urine. What if it’s wrong?

“How sure are you that this test is a hundred percent correct?” I have a tiny bit of hope left, hoping he’ll say it’s wrong. I’ve never wished for anything like this in my entire life.

“Of course there is room for error, but to be certain we can do a sonogram.”

“I think that’s a perfect idea.” Thobi says.

He leads me to the bed and I get on top of it with my friends standing next to me. I lift my top up and he

squeezes the gel onto my abdomen. As soon as he places the scanner on me I close my eyes and say a silent prayer, probably the hundredth one today, praying for a heartbeat to not be there.

“Here we go.” The doctor says. “That’s your baby.” I feel tears run down the side of my face. I can’t even bring myself to look at the screen. This has to be a nightmare, I’m pretty sure I’ll wake up and it will be just a bad dream. A really bad one.

“Tee, look at your baby.” Simz says rubbing my hand. I wipe my tears and open my eyes, I look at the screen and the doctor shows me a little round spot on the screen.

“Can we hear the heartbeat?” Thobi asks. The doctor presses some buttons and the sound of the beat fills the room. No matter how much I may want to deny this, it’s real.

We drove home in silence. I sat in the backseat with my head on the window trying to figure out what to do with this whole thing. We get home and I go straight to my room and just throw myself on the bed and cry. I feel the bed move before I feel hands engulfing me into a hug.

“It’s going to be okay friend, we are here for you.” I hear Simz’s voice behind me. This is not how I planned my life. I want to have kids, one day, but not like this. It would be so easy if what Makhosi and I had was real, but it was nothing more than a figment of my imagination, and now I have a baby growing inside me to prove it.

I’m not sure when I fell asleep but I woke up with the dire need to throw up. The sun was out so it’s morning. I quickly rushed to the bathroom and emptied the little contents of my stomach. I didn’t have anything to eat since yesterday morning so my stomach is pretty empty. I gagged releasing nothing.

I sat there until the nausea passed . I washed my hands and face then brushed my teeth. When I went back to the bedroom I found Pinky on the bed looking at her phone.

“Morning sickness kicking in already.” She says with a smile on her face. I roll my eyes and get on the bed.

“Where are the others?”

“They went home. They have husbands.” She says laughing.

“And the single ones stayed behind.” I say and she laughs.

“Yep. So how are you feeling?”

“Like an idiot that got played, and now I’ll have the evidence of my stupidity to look at for the rest of my life.”

“A baby is a blessing Tee. Maybe once the shock wears off it will be okay.”

“I’m probably being punished for something.” She frowns.

“Punished for what?”

“I don’t know.”

“Don’t be dramatic, this baby is not a punishment. So are you going to tell him?”

“No. In actual fact I’m going to have an abortion.”

She turns to look at me with her eyes popped out.

“Don’t look at me like that, abortions are legal in this country.” I get off the bed and go to the kitchen with her behind me.

“Abortion is legal yes, but there is no need to be irrational about this.”

“I’m not being irrational, I’m doing what’s best for me and this child.”

“That’s fine, if that’s what you want to do then I’ll support you, but please, take some time and think things through. Give it a week before you make hasty decisions. You are eight weeks along so that means you still have four more weeks to make a decision.” I fill the kettle up with water, switch it on

and turn to look at her.

“I don’t need four more weeks Pinks, i know what I want and this baby is not it.”

“The least you can do is tell Makhosi about the baby, he deserves to know. Whatever decision you make after that will be on you, but he deserves to know.”

“Why? So he can win another bet?”

“I know you’re angry at him, rightly so but don’t use an innocent child to punish him, and don’t punish a child for mistakes or rather choices they know nothing about.” I shrug and make my tea.

She sighs and takes a seat. I might be jumping the gun a bit but I’m not going to put myself in a position where I’ll have to deal with Makhosi for the rest of my life.

MAKHOSI

It's been a week since I saw Tivikele and watched her burn my stuff to a crisp. I know she is angry at me but I'm not about to give up on her. But I need to start at the beginning and fix things with her family. I need to make things right with them otherwise this will be an uphill battle, not that it's any smoother now.

I was busy tending to the cows before our morning deliveries went out. Today my brother will be doing the deliveries, I need to have a serious conversation with my dad. I finished helping with packing everything in the truck then went back to the house. As usual my dad was sitting outside the front door on the veranda reading his newspaper. I got a chair and sat down next to him.

“Gumede. Kuhamba kahle (is everything okay?)” he asks closing his newspaper and folding it.

“Not really, I need your help.”

“With what?”

I tell him everything from the beginning to the end. By the time I'm done I can see his unimpressed face, not that I expected him to be over the moon about my stupidity.

"Banishaye kancane (they should have beat you up some more.)"

"I know what we did was stupid....."

"Stupid doesn't even begin to cover it. You played with someone's heart, their love, do you think that's something you can fix with just an I'm sorry?"

"Of course not. Which is why I'm here. I need your help. I want to go and apologise to her family."

"That's a start."

"So I'll need your help. I need you and the uncles to accompany me."

"Fine, so what are you bringing with you as an apology?"

"Three cows."

“Mine or yours?” I chuckle.

“From mine. We’ll dip into yours if they want more.”

“No you won’t. I’ll call the uncles and let them know. Is she going to pass on the message or are we going to just show up there unannounced.”

“I was thinking we should just go. If we let them know we are coming they might just get a restraining order before we get there.” He laughs. I don’t think this is the time for him to be laughing but I’ll let him have it.

“I can’t believe you went for a girl whose family clearly does things opposite to what everyone does. Couldn’t you ask me, I would have got for you a great girl down in the village.”

“I’m sure you could have, but this is the one I want. Anyways I have to go. I need to go to KwaMaiMai, Bab’Shenge promised me some ointment for my bruises.” My dad laughs. I should have kept the beating to myself, but he would have found out anyway, my siblings have social media.

I wrap up my conversation with my dad and then drive to Joburg. When I get to KwaMaiMai I head straight to Bab'Shenge's stall. He has a few customers so I have to wait my turn. I wait a few minutes before it's my turn.

"Ah, Gumeđe, ubuyile (you are back)?"

"Yebo baba, ninjan kodwa (how are you)?"

"Sisaphefumula nje ndodana (we are still breathing son. Are you here for your ointment?"

"Yes." He takes a small Vaseline container from under the counter and hands it to me. It has a black substance in it, it actually looks like it was mixed with the Vaseline.

"Take this and after bathing, rub this on your wounds, it should help with scaring and make sure those bruises don't leave a mark." I take the container and shove it into my pocket. We stand there chatting for

about anything and everything before I have to go. I say my goodbyes and head to my car.

Just a few moments before I get to my car I see Tivikele getting off her car together with her friend Pinky. They seem to be having a good time because they are laughing and chatting. I turn around so they don't see me. When they are out of sight I rush to my car and just sit inside waiting for them to come out. I know I'm being a stalker right now but I just want to see her, even if it's from afar.

They come out fifteen minutes later with a plastic bag filled with takeaways. I can bet my last cent that what they have there is probably ulusu. I watch her get into her car and they drive off.

I don't know how, I don't know when, but what I do know is that one day, she will be my wife. One day. I just need to be patient.

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I know I told Pinky I would rethink this decision but there is absolutely nothing to think about. I can't have this child, and anyone who tells me different will have to work overtime to convince me of that. I've made an appointment with an abortion clinic in Pretoria. I know it will be a long drive back especially after I've done the procedure but it also means none of my friends will try and stop me.

I didn't tell Pinky about my appointment although I did ask her to clear the rest of my afternoon, I only told her I'm tired and need to rest. It's been a week since I found out I am pregnant and it still feels like a wild dream, but the nausea and dizziness I go through daily is a constant reminder that this is not a

dream.

I finished up my early meetings before driving to Pretoria. The closer I got to Pretoria. I felt my heart rate rising. Fear creped in and all the worse case scenarios started playing in my mind. What if something goes wrong? What if my womb ends up being infected and it has to be removed? All the what if's I could think off played around in my head.

I got to the clinic and parked my car outside. I sat there for about ten minutes contemplating on my next move. I mastered up some courage and went in.

"Hi. I have an 14:30 appointment." I told the lady at reception.

"Hi. Your name?" She answered not even looking at me.

"Nomzamo Majola." She clicked her keyboard and I guess she found my name cause she handed me a

clipboard with some documents to fill in.

"Fill that in and we'll take it from there." I sat down with the clip board and filled in the forms.

When it was my turn I handed in the clipboard and paid cash for the procedure. The nurse led me to a room and told me to take off my clothes and put on the hospital gown. She walked out and I stood there wondering if I was doing the right thing. The doctor walked in while I was deliberating with myself. I guess its now or never.

"Miss Majola, I take it you are aware of the what this procedure entails?"

"Yes."

"Okay, I am Doctor April and I'll be performing the termination. Please get on the bed." I get on the bed and lift my legs up leaving my whole vagina bare. I feel tears stream down my face. This is the only thing tying me to Makhosi and once I get rid of it

then it's gone, for good, there is no getting it back or any do overs. Its permanent. Am I really ready for this or I'm just letting my anger cloud my judgment?

I feel something pinch near my cervix. I open my eyes and the doctor has a big ass needle in his hand. Next to him there is a a trolley with a bunch of things I dont know. I'm guessing they are about to go inside me. My heart starts to race and I feel sweat dripping down my face. He takes a something that looks like a rod if some sort ready to insert it inside me. My thighs quickly close like a couple of magnets being pushed towards each other.

I cant do this. I really cant. I sit up on the bed and I can see the confused look on the doctor's face.

"Miss Majola?" He questions looking at me more annoyed than anything.

"I'm sorry, I cant do this. I just cant." I jump off the bed, grab my things and walk out. I find a bathroom in the passage and I get in and change. I lock myself

in the cubicle and silently sob my eyes out. Why did I have to get pregnant? Like this? I would have been so happy any other time either than now. But now here I am, pregnant and alone. This is not how I planned my life.

I hear someone walk into the toilet and I quickly compose myself. When I hear the latch on the other cubicle lock I get out and wash my face in the sink. I look at my face in mirror and try and master up the inner bad bitch in me. But she too seems to have left me, just like my poor heart and pride.

I walk out of the clinic and head to my car. While searching for my keys inside my bag I bump into something or someone and my bag makes contact with the floor. I don't even have the energy to look at whatever or whoever I hit. I kneel down and pick up the contents of my bag that are now scattered all over the street. And for some reason my tears also fall.

"Are you Okay?" A hoarse voice that sounds familiar breaks through my mumbled up brain. I look up and find Andile staring at me, pity and worry written all over his face. "Tivikele, what's wrong?" He holds my arms and pulls me up. He picks up my things from the ground and puts everything back in my bag. The tears fall uncontrollably. He holds me in his arms and I just sob. If pregnancy makes a person this emotional then I don't want it.

"Hey, where is your car?" He asks while I'm still sobbing on his chest. I point behind him, he takes the keys from my hands and leads me to the car. He opens the passenger side and I get in. He gets in on the drivers side. I don't know where he is taking me, but he starts the car and drives to God only knows where.

Somewhere along the way I fell asleep. When I woke up he was putting a blanket over me. I look around

and I am in my house. I sit up on the bed and Andile sits next to me.

"Hey." I try to force a smile but I fail.

"Hi."

"What's wrong?" I shake my head trying to control the tears threatening to fall. He takes off his shoes and blazer and gets on the bed. He sits next to me. We sit there with our heads resting on the headboard.

"I always knew there was some gangster hiding behind that sweet face your mother likes to present." I burst out laughing, forgetting my problems, even for just a few seconds.

"Please, you forgot what happened when we sneaked out in boarding school to go to that concert in town? Ended up coming back two days later."

"Tjeses, that is one moment I'll never forget. We came back to find her and the other parents in the school hall, and your mother was the only one with a

sjambok. She beat the shit out of everyone, black, white, Indian she didn't care. Even the other parents couldn't do shit but stand there and watch."

We laugh and reminisce on the past. For a moment I forget my own problems. But like the sun that always rises in the morning, they always show up to remind me that they are still here. I feel a bout of nausea bubbling up. I run to the bathroom and vomit. When I'm done I rinse my mouth and go back to bed. Andile hands me a bottle of cold water and I gulp down a few sips and place the bottle on the side table. I take a deep breath and close my eyes.

"I'm pregnant." I blurt out, unsure how Andile will take it. Heck, I don't know how I can take it either. It's the first time in a week I've said the words out loud. I've thought about it but I didn't say it out loud. And now it's out of my own lips.

"I figured. I didn't think you were at that clinic for the fun of it. So I take it you didn't go through with it?"

He asks staring up at the ceiling.

"I couldnt."

"I thought you were happy with him, why would you want to get rid of his child?" Strangely enough I expected some judgement and I told you so's from him but nothing, he seems to be more understanding than I gave him credit for.

"Not all that glitters is gold. Makhosi turned out to be the opposite of what i thought."

"I see. So what now? What are you going to do with the baby?"

"I dont know. I feel like my world is falling apart and there is nothing I can do to fix it."

"Theres always something to be done. A baby is a blessing. Does he know?"

"No! He doesn't deserve to know and he will never know." I feel the bed move before I feel his eyes boring into my skin.

"I'm probably the last person to even defend this

man but he deserves to know Tivikele. He might have done what he did to you but dont use the child as a pawn to fight your battles."

A knock disturbs whatever I was about to say to him. He gets off the bed and rushes out to answer the door. Before long I hear commotion coming from the lounge. I get off the bed and follow the sound. I get to the lounge and find Andile and Makhosi in a staring contest. Even after I walk into the room none of them are willing to even blink. Men and their inflated egos.

I leave them there and head to the kitchen. I take out some meat from the fridge. I need to make dinner and I feel like having roasted chicken tonight. Those two can do whatever they want.

"Tivikele, why is he here?" I guess the staring contest is over. I turn around to find Makhosi breathing cold air through his nose. He is mad. This would be cute

if I didn't hate his guts.

"The question should be why are you here? There is nothing for you here." I cross my arms on my chest. Andile takes an apple from the fruit bowl and sits on the highchair. "Why are you here Makhosi?" He takes a few deep breaths, his hands go to his waist.

"We need to talk, alone." He emphasises the last word looking at Andile. Andile just keeps munching on his apple.

"We have nothing to talk about Makhosi. Now you can leave."

"Why were you at the abortion clinic?" My lips go dry and my throat becomes a desert. Andile stops chewing and stares at me.

"Are you stalking me?" Classic liar tendencies. Turn the blame onto someone else. "Are you having me followed Makhosi?" I try to keep my anger and panic in check. Who even panics and gets angry at the same time. I seriously hate this person I've become.

"I am not having you followed. But I still want to know what you were doing at an abortion clinic."

"That's none of your business."

"Are you pregnant?"

"You wish. Please leave, if there is nothing else for you to say." He sighs and takes a step towards me then stops.

"Tivikele, I know you're angry at me, with good reason, but please tell me the truth. I know you had an appointment at the clinic. And I know why, I just need to hear it from you, did you have an abortion?"

"Yes. Yes I did. I want nothing that ties me to you Makhosi. You played your bet and you won, now you can move on to the next game."

I know I am wrong to lie to him like that, but maybe I want him to feel just a bit of the pain I felt when I found out about his little games. He bites his lower lip and blinks rapidly for a few minutes. In just

seconds his eyes have become blood red. Its like he is holding back tears. He walks close to me and he pulls me to him and hugs me. I'm not sure if I should even hug him back. He has his hand behind my neck. He kisses the top of my head.

"I love you Tivikele, I know you wont believe me and that's fine, but I do love you. And I will always love you." He kisses me again and then turns and walks out. I stand there watching the empty space he just left.

"That was cruel." I even forgot Andile was here. "I might not like the guy very much but that was cruel Tivikele. And I know that's not who you are. Whatever he did to you that's making you lose the essence of who you are, you need to let it go, and fast." He leaves me there and goes to the bedroom. When he comes back he is dressed and ready to go. "My uber is here, I need to go get my car. I'll check on you later." He hugs me and walks out too.

I grab my phone and scroll down to Makhosi's number. I'm not sure if I should call him and tell him the truth.

MAKHOSI

I thought my heart broke when Tivikele found those messages, but that is nothing compared to what I'm feeling now. I knew she was angry, but I didn't think she hated me so much she would do something like this. I didn't want to believe it when Zizo told me, but after greasing some palms at the clinic I found out it was true. A part of me was hoping she'd say she cancelled the appointment that's why she was there, but I guess that was just a farfetched dream.

I've been sitting in the balcony of my bedroom
watching the sun set, it feels like its setting with my

heart, except when it rises tomorrow it won't bring back my heart.

"You know if I didn't know better I'd say you are about to pay lobola. It's just an apology son, why are you so cut up about it." My dad says behind me. I turn and lean on the railing and look at him.

"It's not nerves, just the realization that Tivikele hates me."

"She doesn't hate you , angry yes, hate, I don't think so."

"Then why did she kill my child?" He opens his mouth to say something then closes it again. He takes a seat on the chair and takes out a bottle of beer from the collarbox and opens it.

"What do you mean?"

"I almost became a father. Almost."

"She was pregnant?"

"Yep. And now she's not. My baby is gone."

"I'm sorry son."

"It's fine. Maybe this is my punishment for what I did to her."

"So what do we do about going down to KZN? Are we still going? Cause your uncles are here, the cows are ready and we have the permits."

"We are still going. I do still need to do right by the Majola's."

"Okay. I know you just want to be alone so I'll just tell your uncles that you have a headache and you'll see them in the morning."

"Ngyabonga baba. (Thank you.)" He leaves and I turn back to the sun already hiding behind the mountains.

I take another beer from the cooler box and open it. Before I can take a sip I pour the liquid down to the ground below.

"I'm not sure if you were a boy or a girl, but the name Hlelolenkosi would have been fitting. This whole

thing might have started badly, but your presence would have been God's plan. But I guess heaven just gained a new angel. Rest in peace my angel."

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Unedited ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

There should be a crime against early morning phone calls. I mean who wakes up this early to call someone else and wake them up. I swear I'm tried right now.

I blindly grab my buzzing phone from the side table and answer it without even checking who is calling. For their sake though, I hope whatever they have to say is good.

"Hello." I mumble into the phone.

"Tivikele, usalele (are you still sleeping?)" I slowly open my eyes to see who is calling and my mothers name is on the screen. I put the phone back on my

ear.

"Ma, its early. What's going on?"

"Hhay wena, wake up. Your boyfriend is here."

"Ma, I'll call you later." I hang up the phone and throw it on the bed next to me. I try to doze back to sleep but no, my mother woke up this morning and chose violence. I pick the phone up.

"Ma, please can I just have five more minutes?"

"Tivikele did you hang up on me?" She says. From the sound of it she is saying this between gritted teeth. I've just committed a cardinal sin by hanging up on her. Now I'm glad I'm as far away from as I can be.

"I'm sorry mummy, I'm just tired."

"So you take your tiredness out on me?"

"Ngyacolisa Hlubi wakucala, shumi lekutsenga (clan names.) I'm sorry mummy." I hear her sigh. One of my other super powers is the ability to know which buttons to press to calm her down.

"I was telling you that your boyfriend is here."

"Which boyfriend?"

"How many do you have?" She snaps. Mxm, right now any chance of me going back to sleep is dead and buried.

"None."

"Makhosi is here with his uncles or whatever those men are to him." It takes a second for what she just said to register in my head. I quickly sit up dropping the phone on the bed. I pick it up again.

"Mum, it's too early for you to be pranking me." I cross my fingers hoping she will laugh and says gotcha, but she doesn't.

"I wish this was a prank. Did you too agree to get married?"

"Heck no. What is he even doing there?" I cannot believe that idiot would do this to me.

"Beats me. But judging by the truck with cows in it, this is big." Cows? What the heck is happening.

"Mum, please don't let them in." I get off the bed and start pacing up and down. I might be overreacting but I've heard of girls who were married off even when they were not there. I know my dad wouldn't do that to me but hey, you never know.

"Too late nana, your dad is already at the gate talking to them. And Bahole is on his way here. And your uncle too." This is serious mosi.

"Mum, I'll call you back." I hang up and dial Makhosi's number. It rings a couple of times before he cuts the call and it sends me to voice mail. I call again and I get the same response. I swear I'm going to kill him.

I call my mother back and lucky for me she picks up.

"Baby. They are inside." She whispers.

"Ma, I swear if you marry me off to that toe of satan I will never forgive you." She laughs. Trust her to laugh

at a time like this.

"Oh sweetie, was he a toe of satan when he was flipping you up and down like a pancake? Was he a toe of satan when he was rearranging your insides? Relax. I'm sure it's not that bad. For all I know he could be here to marry your sister. I'll update you when we are done with them." She hangs up before I can even say anything else. This must be the season to try Tivikele.

NARRATED

In Winston Park at the Majola home, Makhosi, his dad and his uncles are in the lounge waiting for the Majola's to attend to them. Bab'Majola is in the kitchen with his wife.

"Batsi bafunani Majola? (What do they want?)" She

asks him handing him a cup of tea.

"I dont know. I'm waiting for my brother and Bahole to show up first. I'm not going to address them without someone else there to be a witness."

"Oh, so what am I supposed to be?"

"You know what I mean hawu." He answers with a smile on his face.

"Fine. Let me make them some tea."

"That would be nice. Let me call these two and ask them how far they are." He takes his phone out and walks to the garage and makes the call.

Meanwhile Mrs Majola makes the tea and takes it to the lounge. When she comes back to the kitchen her husband comes in with his brother and Bahole. They greet and proceed to the lounge. They take their seats and look at their guests.

"So, please introduce yourselves and tell us why you are here?" Majola's brother says. Makhosi's dad

clears his throat and puts the cup of tea down.

"Majola, Mchunu, Macingwane, Ngqulunga, Nyanda yemkhonto, Ndabezitha, Phakade, Yeyesa, Ndlela zabedluli nabaGodusi, Sobiya ngomthongwana abafokazana bebiya ngamahlahla, Mabonw'abulawe! Thina singabaka Khuzwayo. Size laykhaya sihola nay indodana yami izocela ucolo, igeze nomuzi wakaMajola, hence yezenzo zakhe. (We are the Khuzwayo's. We are here leading my son who has come to apologize and cleanse your home.)" The Majola's look at each other before turning back to their guests.

"Ucinsile umfowethu Macingwane, sonke siyazi ngesehlakalo esenzekile lakhona ningenele yona ingane ngemishiza. (My brother is right, we all know about the incident where you ended up beating him up.) We questioned him about it and he told us what led to that. He told us about how he disrespected your daughter and played with her heart. That is why he sent us here to come and apologize." His uncle adds.

"Siyezwa madoda. (We hear you.) But what's with the cows outside?" Bab'Majola asks.

"Well, we couldnt come empty handed. We hope it will be enough to show how sorry we are." Another Khuzwayo elder says.

"Hhay siyabonga ukuthi umfana ulibonile iphutha lakhe. (We are glad the boy saw his mistake.)" Majola's brother says.

"Cha, siyalwamukela ucolo lwenu, futhi siyamcolela umfana. (We accept your apology and we forgive the boy.)" Bab'Majola says. "But as much as we have accepted his apology, we cannot speak for Tivikele and how she feels about this. Us accepting this apology doesn't mean she will also feel the same way."

"We understand, and we know he still has some amends to make with her. And we can only leave that to him to fix." Khuzwayo says.



TIVIKELE

Six hours and seven minutes, that's how long it takes to drive from Durban to Joburg. Well atleast according to Google maps. It's been almost seven hours and he is still not here. Its Saturday so I know he wont drive back to the farm, he has to go to the club.

I'm in his house waiting, I've been waiting for the past two hours and he is still not here. Don't ask me why I still have a key to his place. I can't bring myself to stay still. I keep pacing up and down. My eyes keep going back to the new portrait hanging on top of the mantelpiece of the fireplace. When he painted that, if anyone would have asked me I would have sworn I had found my happily ever after. But I was

wrong, and now looking at that portrait just makes me sad.

I hear the door opening, I turn around and watch him walk in. He stops when he sees me. I thought he'd be excited to see me in his house, not that it would have changed things but still.

"Tivikele, what are you doing here?"

"Why did you go to my parents?" I ask with my arms crossed on my chest. I've been holding on to this anger since morning and I need to let it out.

"I'm pretty sure they have told you already." He says taking his shoes off and throwing himself on the couch.

"I want you to tell me. Why would you even think about going there? That's my family. What were you hoping to achieve?"

"Tivikele, I am tired. It's been a long day and I'm tired. So please just say what you came here to say and

leave."

"You can't be serious."

"I am. I've apologized to your family for my stupid choices, I've apologized to you, I can't force you to forgive me and that's fine. But I think we are even now don't you think?" The look in his eyes, I don't know what it is, but it's not good.

"What do you mean we are even?"

"I hurt you and you hurt me. I broke your heart and you went and killed my child. So we are even." I swallow and hold on to my tummy. I even forgot I told him I had an abortion.

"Stop acting like the victim here Makhosi. Me choosing to have an abortion had absolutely nothing to do with you."

"So you didn't have an abortion to make sure you have nothing that ties you to me?" He asks, his eyes staring deep into my soul. I turn away from his stare but I know he is still looking at me.

"That's not the point."

"Right." He stands up and walks close to me. He holds my chin and turns me to face him. "You can deny it all you want but we both know if the child had been someone else's you would have kept it. I remember you saying you didn't believe in abortion, but the moment you fall pregnant with MY child then all of a sudden you believe in it." I try to turn away from him but his strong hands are holding me in place. "You hate me and that's fine. I fucked up. I will always regret what I did to you, but now we are even right?"

I feel my heart pump more blood than necessary raising my heart beat. I hate how he still affects me even when I hate him. I close my eyes trying so hard to calm my heart and not let him being so close to me affect me. I feel his warm breath close to my face, and when I open my eyes he is barely an inch away from my face. His lips meet my slightly open

lips, I'm stuck in place I can't even tell him to stop. Do I even want him to stop?

His hand snakes around the back of my neck and I feel fires burning every inch of my body he touches. I hate my body for betraying me and responding to every single one of his touch. My lips respond to his kiss and and my hands find themselves holding on to his tshirt and instead of pushing him away I find myself getting closer to him.

I dont know when or how I ended up on the couch but that's where I find myself. With his one hand balancing on the couch and the other pulling up my dress. His bare hands leaving trails of fire on my thighs. He lets go of my lips and begins an assault of kisses down my neck and down to my exposed boobs. He cups one breast with his hand and his lips on the other and I find myself with my hand on his head enjoying every bit of this moment.

He moves from my boobs and unbuttons the dress exposing me. He continued to plant kisses down my body till he gets to my throbbing mound. I squirm under his touch. I feel his thumb rubbing on my swollen clit. He replaces his thumb with his tongue and I see stars.

After a few moments he lifts himself up and pulls off his tshirt. He comes back down and kisses me. I feel him insert himself into my wet haven. He moves in and out of me in slow strokes. And for some reason its perfect. He stops kissing me and stares at me for what seems like forever. When I look up at him I see tears glistening in there. For a moment I feel bad but then I'm brought back to reality when he shoves himself deep into me. His strokes get deeper and faster. He digs deep into me until I feel my body release. He keeps going till he reaches his own climax.

He slumps on top of me and within seconds I feel

my shoulder getting wet. What if Andile was right, I shouldn't have told him I had the abortion.

"Makhosi?" He pulls himself up and his eyes are now red. He is crying. He stand up and puts his tshirt on.

"You can leave the key when you go. I need a shower I have to go to the club." He leaves me laying there naked and goes to the bedroom. And before long I hear the shower running.

I get up and get dressed, I grab my bag and walk to the door. I leave the key on the side table and walk out. I close the door and stand there for a hot second trying to breath. We have said our goodbyes, its quite ironic actually that the first time I met him we ended up sleeping together, and today, when we say our last goodbye we made love. I hold on to my little tummy, the only thing that will serve as a reminder for the moments we shared, when I was oblivious and naive. How I wish I could go back there, even if it's one time, just for me to be happy again.

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Unedited ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

I need a new wardrobe, its getting harder and harder to hide the bump. These maxi dresses all the time are beginning to make it obvious that I have a baby bump underneath. I havent seen or spoken to Makhosi in over six months, I guess me being in and out of the country helped me not run into him or his friends. And I havent spent much time in the office either so I know Sphetho probably hasn't noticed I'm pregnant which means he hasn't said anything to Makhosi.

I've just landed from Ghana, turns out Joshua Industries really did open doors for me. I've signed about eight new clients in the past six months, all with a glowing recommendation from Joshua

Industries. My ten year plan is coming along quite nicely, except maybe for this little hiccup in my tummy. Other than that, I'm good.

I'm tired and sweaty, this baby is definitely making me pay for almost having an abortion. This is my last trip out of the country, now I have to stay put until I give birth, doctors orders. Even flying to Ghana was a risk all on it's own, but I had to do it, and if this baby wants to get fed, he or she will just have to be patient.

I push my trolley down to the parking lot to get my car, I should have just asked one of my friends to pick me up, but no, I had to be superwoman and do it all myself. I finally make it to my car, parking has been paid for now I'm ready to head back to my little sanctuary. Speaking of which, I need to buy a new house, a bigger one somewhere in the suburbs. I love my apartment but I don't think it's a good place to raise a child. I want my child to grow up like I did,

running around and getting dirty, minus the two parent household though, but we will be fine. Right?

Speaking of parents, I havent mastered up enough courage to tell the parents, only Mabutho knows and he agreed to let me tell the parents when I'm good and ready. I have about three weeks to do that before I pop out so I've asked mum to come up this weekend. I know if I tell her then she'll pass the message on to my dad. I just hope he is not too disappointed.

I get back to my apartment and one of the security guys offers to help me with my bags. We get up to my place and I give him a tip before he walks out. Now to unpack.

My phone rings just as I am contemplating where to start my phone rings. Its Mabutho.

"Bhuti."

"Your mum just called me, she is at the airport. I hope you're ready to tell her about the baby." My heart starts racing. I thought I had two days to prepare a proper speech. Holy fuck.

"She didn't tell me she was coming though."

"Well she is here."

"No Mabutho, take her to your place. Tell her I'm not back yet." He chuckles. This is one moment where I pray he is just trying to prank me.

"Didnt you post on your status that you were taking a flight from Ghana?" Shit. "Look, I know this is scary but you're an adult, you can take care of yourself and the baby, it's not like you are a teenage mother."

"I know. But still, this is not how things were supposed to happen."

"True. But we are here now, we cant turn back the time. Relax and tell her. You know she's not a monster."

"Yeah. I guess."

"I'll call you when I've picked her up."

"Okay. Thanks."

I hang up and throw myself on the bed. I'm not really prepared for this but Mabutho is right, it has to be done. I unpack some of my luggage but I get tired before I even finish the first one. Another side effect of pregnancy. Another one is hunger, and right now I am very hungry. I need to the kitchen and make myself a sandwich and oros. I've never liked oros, even as a kid but now I buy the five litres of it every two weeks. Pregnancy will torture you.

I sit down and turn the TV on, I take a cushion and place it on my thighs, its perfect to hide the bump, I put my plate with the sandwich on top of the cushion and my glass of oros sits comfortably on the side table. Perfect. This is the best position to be in, but now I'll have to hold it till mum gets here. I hope I dont get the need to pee anytime soon.

My heart starts beating fast when the door opens.

Mum walks in first and Mabutho follows behind her with her bags. It's now or never.

"Hhaybo, are you going to sit there and not stand up to hug me?" I don't know why I'm scared. She's standing in the middle of the room with her hands on her waist. I figure since I seem to have lost my tongue, the only thing I can do is show her instead of telling her. I stand up with the cushion still hiding my stomach. When I've fully stood up I throw the cushion back on the couch, and as expected her eyes immediately run to my protruding stomach.

"Hi mama." I mutter while playing with my hands. There is no question that she is shocked. Her bulging eyes and open mouth are proof of that. Her hands have left her waist and are now hanging on her sides.

"Tivikele, what is this?" She's pointing to my stomach with her index finger. You'd think she would know, I mean she's had five of those herself. "Ngkhuluma

nawe. (I'm talking to you.)" Now I feel like a naughty little child being reprimanded for stealing sugar.

"I'm pregnant."

"I can see that. And by the looks of it, you're ready to give birth, and you didn't even bother to tell me."

"I'm sorry. I was just scared."

"Scared of what exactly?" She sits down on the couch and I do the same. I thought she'd be shouting and screaming by now but she seems like she is hurt more than anything.

"I was scared of disappointing you." I see tears glistening in her eyes. This is not how I pictured this happening.

"How far along are you?"

"Eight months."

"Wow." That wow alone is enough to tell me she really is disappointed, not at the fact that I'm

pregnant but she's disappointed at me not telling her.

"Ma, I'm sorry, I know I've disappointed you." And now I feel tears well up in my eyes.

"Disappointed me? Tivikele, you're an adult, running a very successful business, why would I be disappointed?" Huh?

"I thought you'd want me to be married first before I have a baby." She chuckles.

"Wow, I thought you and I were close, you could tell me anything before but you couldnt tell me that I'm going to be a grandmother. Wow." She gets up and goes to the bedroom leaving Mabutho and I looking at each other confused as hell.

"What just happened?" Mabutho asks coming to sit next to me.

"Isnt she supposed to be screaming and shouting at me right now?"

"Well, she's clearly hurt more than anything. I wasnt expecting this reaction."

"Yeah."

"Anyways, I have to go, I can't deal with two emotional women. I'm not ready to go crazy." I could ask him to stay but maybe mum and I do need to talk. I walk him out. I close the door and try to figure out how to make it up to my mom. And then I remember she loves cake. I get on Uber Eats and order a chocolate cake from Mugg and Bean.

While waiting for my order I decide to go through my social media and see what's happening in the world. I see Makhosi's club is trending. I check to see why it's on the trends list and apparently there is a grand opening for another branch in Pretoria. Oh well, congratulations to him. I go into my WhatsApp and I'm tempted to view his status. I thought he would have blocked me by now but he hasn't. Weird, cause I blocked him.

A few minutes later I get a call that my delivery is here. I ask the security to let the guy up and a while

later he knocks on the door. I get my order and tip him. I take the two pieces of cake and place them on plates. The other two go straight to the fridge. I get two forks and carry the cakes to the guest bedroom. I knock on the door with my foot since my hands are preoccupied. I hear her say come in from inside. I use my elbow to open the door and get in.

I find her standing by the window looking outside. I walk over to her and hold out the plate in front of her. She looks at the cake and looks at me, the back at the cake. Cake always wins. She takes the plate and takes a bite of the cake.

"Ma, truth is, I didn't tell you not because I was afraid, I was ashamed and disappointed in myself. I had plans, big plans, and now I'm here, pregnant and alone. This is not how I planned my life and I couldn't bring myself to tell you because I thought you'd see me the same way." She turns to look at me.

"Tivikele, you're my child, my first daughter and

umpire carrying my first grandchild. These are moments I would have loved to share in, regardless of how it came about. I would have supported you and helped you through this. I understand your reasons but you've also denied me the opportunity to be a part of this beautiful journey."

"I'm sorry."

"So where is Makhosi in all this?" Aye. I knew this would come up. I sit on the bed with my cake next to me.

"He is nowhere. As far as he is concerned I had an abortion."

"Tivikele!" She snaps. "You mean to tell me the poor boy is out there somewhere mourning a child that is alive and well?" Poor boy? Whose side is she on?

"He'll be fine."

"Fine? Did he tell you he didn't want the baby?" I shake my head. "So you decided to cut him off?"

"You make it sound so bad. We will be fine. I won't

be the first single mother and I sure as hell won't be the last." She chuckles and puts the cake down on the bedside table and turns to look at me.

"Tivikele, I understand you being a single mother, many women do it, but denying Makhosi a place in his child's life is wrong, making him mourn a child that's alive is cruel. You have to tell him the truth."

"Mum, No. Whose side are you on?" I scream at her.

"Unganglingi (don't dare me.) You will not raise your voice at me siyevana (are we clear.)" She sternly replies putting the fear of God in me. I nod my head and look away. "Now, I am going to call Makhosi, and you're going to tell him the truth."

"Mum please."

"Don't mum please me Tivikele, you will not deny that child a chance to have a father in his or her life." She takes her phone out and makes the call. She decides to put the phone on loudspeaker. This woman will be the death of me..

"Okay, fine. Cant we wait until the baby is born?"

"No. You've already denied him eight months of his childs life, you're not adding any more." Makhosi answers the phone.

"MaMajola. Sawubona."

"Makhosi, unjani? (How are you?)"

"I'm good ma."

"Great. Can you come to Tivi's place, she has something to tell you." I hear him sigh. I hope he refuses to come..

"I dont know what she could possibly tell me."

"Trust me, this is important."

"Uhm.. okay. I'll be there in twenty minutes."

"Sibonge baba. (Thank you.)" She hangs up and takes the cake from the table. "Go wash your face and put on something nice." She says and walks out. Now I'm supposed to look nice like I'm expecting the president. Mxm.

I do as I instructed and go to my bathroom to wash my face, I figure I didn't take a shower when I came back earlier and I'm sweaty. I get in the shower, although I'd like to be in the tub, now that's mission impossible all on its own. And I have twenty minutes to get myself clean.

I take a quick shower and get out. Unfortunately for mummy, these dresses are the only thing I feel comfortable in so she'll just have to deal with it. Nothing 'nice' fits me anymore. I put on my dress and slippers and go to the lounge. I hear voices as I get closer. He is here. When did he get here? He said twenty minutes. How long was I in the shower?

"Woza ntomboo. (Come girl.)" My mother and her drama, she went from being disappointed to wanting to stick it to me. If this is her payback then she is winning. I come behind Makhosi and he still has his eyes on his phone which is on his lap.

"Hi." I say and walk past him and sit down. He lifts his head up and looks at me. I'm not sure what the look in his eyes is. But its bothering on, hatred, maybe.

"Hello."

"Before we even go any further. Tivikele, stand up." Mum is determined to milk this for all it's worth. I stand up and reveal my huge bump and Makhosi's eyes are glued to it.

"You're pregnant?" He asks matter of factly.

"Yes." I sit back down.

"You told me you had an abortion?"

"I lied. I wanted to but I couldnt do it."

"Do you hate me that much?" What? "You hate me so much you had to lie about my child being dead?" Tjo. What do I even say to that. Do I hate him? I wish I did. It would make things so easy for me. But I dont. I've never hated him. Am I angry at him? I used to be, but am I still angry? I dont know.

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Unedited

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"I'll leave you two to talk. And when I say talk I mean talk, no yelling or screaming. I'll be in the bedroom talking to your father." And it gets worse. Mum is clearly on a mission of her own. Maybe this is her payback for me not telling her first. But I guess I have to face the music at some point and there is no better time than now.

I sit there refusing to say the first word. Makhosi is looking at me not saying anything either. Now we are just in a staring contest and no one is willing to lose.

"I SAID TALK!" Mum screams from the bedroom making me jump. Even Makhosi turns back like she is behind him.

"Were you ever going to tell me?" He mutters after a while.

"Honestly, I dont know."

"Your hatred for me....."

"Okay stop. One thing you wont do is play the victim, because you're far from it. For all I know you got me pregnant on purpose." He chuckles.

"Really? You think I'd do that?" Is he seriously asking me that right now?

"I didn't think you'd play me but here we are. So excuse me if I don't trust you." He sighs and leans forward, he grabs the glass of juice on the coffee table and takes a sip. Mum really did lay out the red carpet for him, she even gave him my favourite biscuits, the ones I crave most in the middle of the night. For her sake I hope she left me some cause she will have to wake up and go find me some.

"I did not get you pregnant on purpose Tivikele. But

I'm glad you didn't have an abortion." I'm not sure what to say to that. A thank you maybe?

"I believed you, you know." His brow creases in confusion.

"What?"

"When you said you loved me, I believed you. I believed you when you said I was the future Mrs Khuzwayo. Even though marriage was never something that appealed to me, you made me see myself differently. I even imagined myself barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen. But it was all a lie. It wasn't real. Nothing you ever said to me was real. And that's what hurt the most. If you had been honest with me about your little bet maybe I would have played along, heck I would have made sure to keep my heart safely locked somewhere. But you didn't, instead you strung me along with lies. And the worse part of it all is you sending my pictures to your friends. If this was some game that you played by yourself maybe it would hurt less, but you made a mockery of me even with your friends. I didn't tell you I had an abortion because I hated you, I did it

because I loved you, but I didn't want you close to me, I didn't want your presence in my life to lead me to resenting my child. I needed time away from you to deal with things on my own. It had nothing to do with you, but it had everything to do with my own sanity." That was a mouthful and a half. But i guess i needed to get it off my chest.

I'm not perfect, and maybe me telling him I had an abortion was a tad bit cruel, but I needed to deal with this all on my own, without him breathing down my neck at every turn, because one thing I know he would have been there at every turn, whether it was a doctor's appointment or trying to make me eat the right things. The past few months might have been a bit stressful but they gave me a necessary solitude to figure out what I need to do and where to go from here. He gets up from the single couch and comes to sit next to me. With his one leg propped up on the couch he turns to look at me.

"I dont think I'll ever be able to forgive myself for what I did to you Tivikele, I fucked up, I know that and I'll live with that reality for the rest of my life. As badly as this began, when I said I loved you, I meant it. I know you won't believe me, but it's the truth. I love you. I didn't think I'd be feeling this way eight months later but I do. But I also know I cant make you trust me again, and that's on me. But I do hope one day you can forgive me, if not for anything then for our child, he or she deserves so much better."

"She!"

"Huh?"

"Its a she. It's a girl." A wide smile fills his face, and for the first time since he he got here his smile reflects in his eyes. I almost fill guilty for keeping him in the dark all this time. Almost!

"I have to show you something." He says almost excitedly. He lifts the sleeve of his shirt revealing his fresh arm. He turns his arm around and shows the inside of his wrist. There is a name written there. He

got a tattoo.

"You got a tattoo?" He nods his head. "You hate tattoos." I remind him as if that will automatically erase the tattoo on his arm.

"I know, but I figured this one time wouldn't hurt." I read the name on his wrist and it's Hlelolenkosi. I know it's a unisex name but I keep picturing a woman with that name, and for some strange reason I hate her.

"Hlelolenkosi? Nice name. Who is she?" He stares at me with an amused smile on his face.

"I didn't say it was a girl."

"Why would you have a man's name on your arm?" He chuckles and runs his finger on the tattoo.

"It's a name I gave our child. I figured Hlelo would be perfect since I didn't know if it was a boy or a girl." Guilt keeps knocking on the door wanting to be let in but my pride refuses to budge.

"It's a beautiful name. Hlelolenkosi." It has a nice ring

to it I'll admit. And baby seems to like it too cause she gives me a kick so hard you'd think I was growing a little Ronaldo. I hold the side of my stomach where she kicked and Makhosi notices.

"Are you okay."

"I'm fine. She just kicked me too hard."

"I'm sorry." He looks at my hand laying on my stomach.

"Do you want to feel?"

"I don't want to intrude." Really? I grab his hand and place it on my tummy. She kicks again and worry floods his face. "Is it not painful?"

"I'm used to it. Plus the hard kicks are not an everyday thing." He chuckles as another kick lands on his hand. This time a little lighter.

I look up and see my mother peeping into the room, a smile plastered on her face. She gives me a thumbs up and disappears back into the hallway. She is so nosy.

"I have a doctors appointment tomorrow if you want to come."

"I'd like that." His aura seems a little lighter than when he came here. Maybe mum was right, all we needed was to talk.

The doctors appointment went better than I thought. Makhosi was asking too many questions even the doctor was amazed. But I guess that's what happens when you try to fit in six months of information in one doctors session. After the doctors appointment he drops me off at my place. I find mum in the kitchen making lunch.

"Hi ma."

"Hi baby. Go sit down I'll bring you some lunch." Just what I needed. I put my feet up on the coffee table and with the remote next to me, Netflix on and I'm

good for a few hours. Mum brings me a steaming plate of creamy chicken pasta. This day is getting better. She sits down next to me with her own plate.

"So how was the appointment?"

"It was good. The baby has turned and she could come anyday now."

"That's good. Is your bag packed?"

"Almost. I've been thinking of buying a house. The apartment is good but I need a proper homely place to raise the baby. That's why I haven't had the energy to prepare the nursery."

"That's fine. You can set up a cot in your bedroom in the meantime and then when you find the house then you can set up the nursery there. And now that you and Makhosi will be co-parenting I'm sure he will be happy to help you."

"I guess. By the way, I forgot to ask last night, what did dad say?"

"He'll be fine. He is a bit disappointed but excited. Technicalities aside this is his first grandchild so he

will be happy."

"Thanks mum, I didnt know how I would tell him."

"That's what mothers are for."

A horizontal line of 20 black dots. The 10th dot from the left is highlighted in white, while the others are black.

MAKHOSI

"Zizojik'izinto, thula mntanami

Wen'ukhalelani, thula mntanami

Wen'ukhalelani, thula mntanami

Wen'ukhalelani."

"We're in a good mood today." Ndalo says creeping out behind me.

"Brother!" I hug him, lift him up and spin him around the aisle and he laughs.

"Okay you can put me down now." He says chuckling. I put him down and notice we have an audience now. "You do realise people probably think we are a gay couple right now?" He says laughing.

"Who cares. Anyways I'm glad you came."

"Yeah when you said we were meeting at the mall I didnt think I'd find you in a baby shop. What are we doing here?" He asks picking up a pair of cute pink leggings. I take them from him and throw them on the trolley.

"We are buying stuff for my baby." He looks at me shocked.

"What baby? Dude, you got someone pregnant?"

"Yep. Where else would a baby be coming from?" He chuckles and shakes his head.

"Bra, you do realise that you have ruined your chances of getting Tivikele back? I mean we talked about this, you need to be patient and she would forgive you, but now you went and impregnated

someone. You might as well forget about her. And why the fuck are you smiling?" I laugh and pick up some cute dresses and throw them in the trolley. I can tell he is upset right now.

"Relax bra you'll pop a vein. Tivikele is the one having my baby?"

"Huh?"

"Yep. I'm going to be a father."

"Didnt you say she had an abortion?"

"I thought she did. But she lied."

"So she let you mourn a child that's still alive."

"I really dont want to think about that right now. All I know is that my baby will be here soon."

"I guess congratulations are in order then.

Congratulations Baba ka Hlelo. So are you and Tivi back together?"

"Not yet. But like you said, patience is key. And now that Hlelo is coming we will be closer again."

"That's good. I cant believe one stupid bet led to this.

You know what, we should name the baby Bettina since she is the product of a bet." He says with a smug smile on his face. This idiot.

"Voetsek. Let's go get the strollers. What else does a baby need anyway?"

"You've already filled up the trolley but you're asking now?"

"I'm pretty sure there is more than one trolley in this shop. Besides, look how cute this is." I pick up a pink tutu from the rail. I get a bigger sized one and hold them both up. "Look at this man, mummy and baby will look so cute in this." I throw both tutus in the trolley and Ndalo laughs behind me.

"You do realise half the things you're buying will be useless in a month or two?"

"It doesn't matter. She'll wear them, I'll take pictures and make memories."

By the time we walk out of the baby shop I have

three trolleys filled with baby stuff. From strollers and carseats to clothes and whatever else the assistant said a baby would need. I part ways with Ndalo in the parking lot and I drive to Tivikele's place. The security offers me a trolley to pack everything in since carrying all these things up to her apartment bit by bit will be too tiring.

We get to the apartment and I knock. Mrs Majola opens the door.

"Sawubona ma, I'm here to see Tivikele."

"Weren't you two together just this morning?" I chuckle and scratch my head. This woman still scares me. I even have the scars to prove it.

"Yebo ma, but I have a delivery for her."

"Okay then." She opens the door wide and I walk in with the security behind me. "Wow." I hear her mumble. The security unloads everything and it almost fills the entire lounge. Mrs Majola is looking at me like I'm crazy.

"So you bought the whole shop?" I laugh nervously. As cute as everything was I dont know if Tivi will like it. I hope she does.

"Not really. I just wasnt sure what to get." She laughs and shakes her head.

"Men. Let me calm Tivi." She leaves and goes to the bedroom. My heart is racing. I dont know why I'm nervous. It's just baby stuff.

"What the heck?" I turn around and find Tivi looking at the stuff, her mouth wide open. "Did you close down the shop?"

"Almost." She chuckles. "I just got the cute stuff. See." I pick out the tutu and hand it to her. The smile on her face means she is happy. Right? I take the other tutu and hold it up. "Look, you two will look cute in your matching tutus." Mrs Majola claps her hands and laughs. I hope that's a good thing. "If you dont like something we can return." She looks at me her eyes popped out like she just saw a ghost.

"Are you Okay?" She looks down at her feet and then back at me.

"My water just broke." Oh shit. The baby is coming.
My baby is coming. What do I do?

THE PLAYERS GUIDE

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Unedited

sponsored post

If I ever have sex again, shoot me. If this is the price i pay for having sex then I'd much rather never have sex again. Okay maybe that's just the pain talking but honestly, I should have just opted for a c-section. Bringing life into the world is one painful thing.

"Aw, aw, aw." My screams fill the whole room as another contraction hit. I've been here for almost four hours and I'm still trying to get this baby out. "Mum, please tell them to get the baby out, this is painful."

"You're almost there baby, just four more centimeters and the baby will be out." She answers holding my hand.

"Do you want me to get you anything in the meantime?" Makhosi asks.

"Just some ice."

"Okay, I'll be right back." He gets up and leaves.

"It is quite nice of you to have him here." Mum says. I'm not sure if she is trying to be sarcastic or what cause we both know hr probably wouldn't be here if it wasnt for her meddling.

The door opens and he comes in with a glass full of ice. I wonder where he got it.

"Thank you." I take the glass and throw one ice cube in my mouth and chew on it which draws the attention of these two. The door opens again and my dad, brothers and sister walk in. Gcinile quickly runs to me and hugs me.

"We will talk about you denying me my Aunty duties later. For now how are you feeling?" I open my mouth ready to answer when the door opens again and my friends walk in with balloons and one huge

teddy bear.

They greet and give me hugs. Another contraction hits and everyone stops what they are doing to stare at me while pain ravages my body. You'd think this was a horror movie. When the contraction passes I open my eyes and relax. I notice my dad is staring at Makhosi. He hasn't said anything since he came in here. I just hope there won't be any drama. Makhosi is trying hard not to look at my dad but judging by his fidgeting and sweating, he knows dad is watching him.

Three hours later and my contractions are coming in fast and strong. Lucky for me I am dilated enough. The doctor comes in with another nurse in tow. He looks around the room and its crowded.

"Unfortunately we can only have two people during the delivery and the others have to wait outside." He announces. My friends immediately walk out leaving my parents and Makhosi in the room. The two men

are staring at each other, well one man is staring at the other and both are refusing to budge. I'm not in the mood for this right now so i look to my mother to butt in like she normally does.

"Majola, what are you waiting for?" She asks.

"I'm waiting for my grandbaby. What else?" He answers nonchalantly. My dad can be stubborn when he wants to be. And I know the only reason he refuses to leave is because of Makhosi. If it weren't for him he would have been the first one out the door.

"Majola!" Mum says between gritted teeth. I guess my dad gets the message because he clicks his tongue and walks out. And I'm pretty sure I saw an eye roll somewhere there.

"Okay then, let's get this baby out." The doctor says. Ten minutes later and my baby girl is making her grand entrance. I'm pretty sure her loud screams can be heard all over the hospital. The nurse takes her

from my chest after the umbilical cord is cut and weighs her. They dress her up while the doctor is stitching me. When he is done they clean me up. I look around for Makhosi and he is already standing with the nurse who is cleaning her up and getting her dressed and he is busy taking pictures.

The nurse brings her back and hands her to me. She is perfect. Her brows are better than those people draw out there. My sweet baby girl. To think I almost cut her life short.

"She is perfect." Mum says wiping away her tears.
"My grandbaby, who knew I'd live to see this day."
The drama.

"Do you want to hold her?" I ask Makhosi who is busy taking photos.

"I've never held a newborn baby before."

"Well what better time to start than with your very own." Mum says coming around to his side. He puts the phone away and takes a seat on the chair. Mum takes the baby from me and puts him in his arms.

"She's amazing." He wipes away a tear. He is looking at her like she is the most beautiful thing in the world. I dont need to be told that she'll probably be a little spoilt princess. The whole shop laying on my lounge floor right now is already proof of that.

The door opens and the family comes in. Everyone is gushing over her.

"So have you decided on a name yet?" Thobi asks.

"Josephine would be perfect. It is your grandmother's name." My dad says earning himself stares from everyone. I love my grandmother very much but I'm not giving mu daughter an old people name. Not happening.

"Dad, that's not happening. I love gogo but imagine when she is three and going to creche and she has to write Josephine as her name. Nope." I tell him.

"That is a dignified name wena. And your grandmother would be happy." He insists.

"Actually the name is beautiful but it would only make sense for a Majola baby to have that name seeing as gogo is the matriarch of the Majola family." Mum comes in. My dad frowns and I know the surname issue will arise.

"This is a Majola baby. Tivikele is not married." Everyone looks at me as if I have the answer to that. I hadn't thought much about which surname the baby would use, all along I thought it would be Majola but now that Makhosi is here I feel like he deserves to have a say in the matter.

"I havent decided on that yet." My dad and Bahole look at me like I've just lost my mind.

"What's there to decide?" Bahole asks.

"If you had a baby what surname would the baby be using?" Gcinile asks.

"Stay out of this Gcinile." He answers.

"No I'm just asking. Would you let your child carry thier mothers surname? Knowing you and how much

you love being Majola, would you?" This one should have never joined the debate team. If there is one thing she will do is debate with you until you agree with whatever she says.

"No damages were paid for the baby therefore she is a Majola." Dad and his drama.

"Well, a birth certificate needs to be registered within thirty days of the baby's birth and that's when we will know what surname she will carry. So Makhosi has thirty days to do what's right. And then we can put this matter to rest." Mum says. Everyone knows not to argue with her once a decision has been made. Although I can see my dad clenching his jaws. He is not happy. But he'll just have to deal. Makhosi and I are the parents here so we are the only ones who can make decisions for the baby.

"Okay, now that that's done, what's her name?" Mabutho asks.

"Hlelolenkosi, I haven't decided on a second name

yet." Everyone seems to be on board with the name. I guess Makhosi does have great taste in names.

The next day I wake up to Makhosi singing to Hlelo. How is she up this early? I turn around on the bed and watch him with her. Inspite of his shady ways, I think he will make a great father.

A horizontal line of 20 black dots. The dots are arranged in two groups of 10, with a gap of 10 dots between the two groups. This visual representation corresponds to the mathematical expression $10 + 10 = 20$.

MAKHOSI

I didn't think I'd feel the way I did when I held Hlelo in my arms. Nervous as I was, it's a moment I'll never be able to forget. My first child. Who would have thought that while I wait patiently for Tivikele to heal and forgive me I'd get more than I bargained for. Life neh, you can't confirm it.

I dropped Tivi off at her place early this morning after she was discharged. As much as I wanted to stay and spend time with Hlelo but the daggers I've been getting from her grandfather and uncle, nope, I can't handle them.

I drive home after checking on the club. Deliveries are out so that's good. I sent a message on the family group last night asking everyone to be here this morning because I have an announcement to make. And as requested everyone is here. Mum and dad are here as well as my siblings.

Everyone is in the lounge sitting around, impatiently waiting for me to spill the good news. I walk in and sit down.

"BoGumede,
OQwabe,
OMnguni kaYeyeye,

Khondlo,

OSidlabelezi bakaPhakathwayo

Abathi bedla, bebebeyenga umuntu ngendaba,

Bethi, "Dluyeya ngenhlana, umalokazana ubeyethe,
kayikhuni sidingida yoyodaba!"

Kanti bahlinz'imbuzi,

Malandela, ngokulandel' izinkomo zamadoda,

Phakathwayo! I come bearing good news."

Everybody is looking at me like I'm some unicorn.

"What happened to you? The past few months you've been sulking and mopping around and now all of a sudden you're singing our praise names, what's going on?" My brother Ayanda asks.

"Like I said, I come bearing good news. I have a daughter." Silence.

"What are you talking about?" Mum asks.

"I am a father to the most adorable baby girl in the

whole entire world." I take my phone out and show her the pictures. The smile on her face is enough to let me know she is just as happy.

"She's beautiful. But we didnt know even had a girlfriend." She continues.

"I dont. Technically speaking she is my ex but if plans go accordingly she will be my wife, soon."

"Is it the Majola girl." My dad asks looking at his grandbaby.

"Yes. That's her."

"Didnt you say she had an abortion?"

"She lied. Anyways I don't blame her. She needed time to heal from everything."

"So she lied to you about your baby being dead?"
Zama and her attitude. This one is always ready for a fight.

"Not now sis wam. Let it go." I turn to my father.
"Baba, I need to go pay damages, if i dont the baby will be using the Majola surname."

"That can't happen." My father says.

"I know. Which is why I need to do this as soon as possible."

"I'll get your uncles on the phone today and maybe we can go down to KZN in a couple of days. Once that is done we need to do imbeleko for her."

"Yep."

"Well, I guess we have a new member of the family then." Phila says.

"So this explains why Tivi has been scarce at work lately." Sphetho announces making everyone turn to him.

"You know the girl?" Zama asks.

"Yes I know her." He answers bothering on cockiness.

"How do you know her? Do you work together?" Mthokozisi asks.

"Actually she is my boss."

"Wait, is she the one you asked me to make a couple of dresses for?" Zama asks looking at me.

"That's the one."

While everyone is busy admiring my little Princess my dad asks to speak to me outside. We walk out into the patio.

"I know its important for my granddaughter to use our surname, but I have a few concerns, are you and her mother in a good space now?"

"Well we spoke about everything a couple of days ago before Hlelo decided to make her grand entrance. I'd say we are on the right path."

"That's good. At the end of the day, whether you get back together or not, the baby needs to be the number one priority."

"I know baba."

"So you really love this girl." I sigh and take a seat on the patio chair.

"You know inspite of how everything started, I do love her. I know her and I talking things through doesn't necessarily make everything right. I still need to show her that I'm worthy of her forgiveness and a second chance."

"I'm glad you understand that what you did was wrong and you're willing to fix it. And I'm happy for you. Finally there will be some life around here."

"You do know you have kids right?" He laughs and takes a few steps towards the edge of the patio looking out at the farm.

"Yeah, that's true, but having grandkids makes all the hard work worth it. Its knowing that my hardwork will be carried on to the next generation and this farm will feed more generations." He turns to look at me. "Ngyabonga Phakathwayo."

I get up and we hug. One thing my father never shied away from was telling us he loved us and even giving hugs. We break the hug and he looks at me like he remembers something.

"Wait here. I'll be right back." He rushes back inside the house. A few minutes later he comes back with two cigars and hands me one. We cut the cigars and light them. "To the future yoKhuzwayo, well done son."

THE PLAYERS GUIDE

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Unedited

The one major positive thing about my family being here is that I haven't done much when it comes to Hlelo. All i do is breastfeed and then boom she's gone. And if it were up to me she'd be on formula, but with a bulldozer like my mother I have no choice but to watch her suck my poor boobs dry. I need to start researching how much a breast lift will cost me.

I've been up for about half an hour now just laying on the bed waiting for my 'servants' to bring Hlelo for her morning feed and then I can get up and take a shower. I know I'm probably taking advantage of my family right now but if i dont, who will. She is barely a week old and everyone is still here. People forget they have jobs to go back to. But I'm not

complaining. Makhosi had been coming in twice a day everyday. Even though he seems uncomfortable around my family he still shows up. If that is not being brave I dont know what is.

The door opens and my dad walks in with Hlelo in his arms. He is holding her like she is the most precious thing in the world. Its quite amazing to see him melt every time he holds her. He is an entirely different person when she is in his arms. Its quite beautiful to see. I sit up on the bed and he hands her to me before he sits down next to me.

"I still cant get over the fact that you are a mother." He says his voice laced with a bit of sadness.

"I can't believe it either. But I guess it's part of growing up right?"

"I know. I just thought I had atleast twenty more years before you had to grow up." I chuckle and he just shrugs his shoulders. "So your boyfriends uncle just called. They are coming to Durban in a couple of

days to pay for inhlawulo."

"That's good."

"Yeah, so we'll have to go down tomorrow, and he says they want to do imbeleko for Hlelo."

"You dont seem to happy about it."

"Its not that. After what happened between you two how certain are you that you can trust him?"

I sigh and try to focus on Hlelo. But my dads words keep ringing in my ear. Sure, Makhosi and I have spoken about everything but can I truly ever trust him? Trust isnt something that's easy to mend. Love, you can forgive and love a person again but trust is a whole different story. When it's broken it doesnt just magically come together again when someone says I'm sorry. But who am I kidding, Makhosi and I are over, the only thing connecting us is Hlelo, so why do I care about trust between us. As long as he does right by Hlelo then it's fine by me.

"It doesn't matter Baba, it's not like we are getting back together. My priority is Hlelo and her alone. And judging from what you just told me, she is his priority too and that's all that matters." I put Hlelo on my shoulder to burp her and within seconds she is done. Either I fed her too much or she loves food. As soon as he hears her burping he gets up and opens his arms. The cow has been milked so my job is done. I hand her to him.

"Thank you. Go take a bath, you smell like milk." He says and walks out. I roll my eyes and head to the shower.

When I'm done I stand by the mirror looking at my body. It's so different to what it was nine months ago. I have stretch mark's all over my thighs and tummy, my stomach looks like it will pop out another baby anytime soon, my boobs are way perkier than they were, thanks to the gallons of milk I seem to produce every single hour. Pregnancy and childbirth are an extreme sport.

I get out of the bathroom and get dressed in my room. I put on a dress and head to the lounge. Mum and Gcinile are in the kitchen making breakfast and my dad and my brothers are in the lounge watching cartoons. Yep. Grown ass men are watching cartoons thanks to Hlelo who is laying on her rocking chair. I decide to join the girls in the kitchen.

"So you didnt have a baby shower?" Gcinile asks as soon as I join them.

"I didn't want one."

"Why?"

"I dont know. It's too impersonal. Plus I dont have that many friends anyway."

"But you have family. Anyways, I am throwing you a baby shower. As soon as this whole mbeleko thing is done we are having one. We'll call it an after party of some sort." Gcinile announces. And by the look of things, nothing I say or do will change her mind so I

let her be.

"We need to start packing for the trip home. We have to leave today to prepare for the Khuzwayo's." Mum says.

"Hawu, aren't we flying down tomorrow?"

"You're not flying anywhere with a newborn. We will have to drive. We should have left early in the morning but we will leave after breakfast. Gcinile, go help your sister pack for the trip." She commands. No point in arguing.

Gcinile and I go to the bedroom and start packing while she finishes up breakfast. When she is done she calls us and we go have breakfast together. When we are done we clean up and get ready for the road. I text Makhosi and tell him that we are leaving. Yes I unblocked him. Not that I had a choice in the matter.

We drive to Durban using my car and Mabutho's since the visitors flew here. The girls are together in one car and the guys in the other. Mum and Gcinile take turns driving while Hlelo and I sit in the back like the queens that we are.

Two days later mum wakes us up early in the morning to cook lunch for the Khuzwayo's. To be honest I'm glad this will be over and done with and then I can focus on bonding with my baby, properly.

The way mum is cooking you would think this was a wedding. She even took out her best plates and cutlery. She is dead set on impressing and I have no idea why cause the plates we use everyday would have just been fine. By the time the Khuzwayo's show up there is everything you could think off on the table. There is sample, rice and dumplings for starch and then there is beef and chicken curry,

boiled chicken and boiled beef, grilled chicken drumsticks and potatoes and salads of every color. There is so much food.

My aunt brought girls from my dad's village eNquthu to come eat the meat that will be slaughtered since there are no virgins in these suburbs, well none that I know off anyway. Some of our cousins from Eswatini are here too. Even my friends came down. I thought this would be a small exchange of money or whatever is required for damages but this seems like an entire ceremony. Even the Khuzwayo's knew to bring a goat and two cows for the ceremony.

One cow and the goat are slaughtered and there is a feast. Things went smoother than I had anticipated. I thought there would be drama somewhere somehow but nothing. Now we have to go back to Joburg so we can have the imbeleko ceremony. Makhosi really wants this over and done with quick. But I guess it's better for it to be done now and we

wont have any problems in future.

A day after the paying of damages my dad calls a family meeting. We all assemble in the lounge.

"Okay, so the Khuzwayo's want to do the imbeleko ceremony this coming weekend. So, since your mother and I cannot go there and attend the ceremony, Gcinile will come with you, your cousin Musa will be there too. Since they said it will be a small ceremony with just family we felt it would only be right that someone from your family comes with you." My dad says.

"And you'll have to go there a few days before the actual ceremony, so when you go back to Joburg you'll probably sleep over at your place when you arrive and then you will go there the next day." Mum adds.

I dont know how I feel about being there for all those days. I know it has to be done and Gcinile and Musa will be there too but still, I dont know Makhosi's

family or how they will be when I get there. But it has to be done right?

>>>>>>>>>>>>>

The trip back to Joburg is long and tiring but when we get there we go past the mall and get takeaways. I'm nervous about being back here without my mom. She's been a godsend when it comes to Hlelo, but she has her own life and a job to go back to so now it's time for me to walk this road by myself. Right now I can lean on Gcinile and Musa for now but they will leave too and go back to their lives.

I push Hlelo out of the restaurant with Musa and Gcinile when we bump into Makhosi's friends Ndalo and Lubanzi.

"Ladies. How are you?" Ndalo says with a huge fake smile on his face. Musa smiles and replies to him.

Gcinile and I stare at him without saying anything. I guess Gcinile also doesn't like them very much either. I on the other hand, I'm still angry about what happened. Makhosi I had to forgive for Hlelo's sake but these ones, I have zero obligation to them so I don't need to be nice or forgiving.

"Tivi, Congratulations on the baby." Lubanzi says. He tries to open the stroller cover to look at Hlelo but pull the stroller back so he gets back too. Ndalo clears his throat.

"We've had a long trip and we want to go home. So if you don't mind." I push the stroller around them and leave. Musa and Gcinile follow me.

"It was nice to see you." One of them screams behind us. I'm guessing Ndalo.

We get to the car and pack the stroller in the boot after strapping Hlelo into her car seat.

"What was that about?" Musa asks as soon as we

are in the car.

"Its nothing." I answer her.

"That didn't look like nothing to me. I recognize those guys from the videos of you guys beating the crap out of them at that club. I dont know why so now I'm guessing its deeper than I thought it was. So spill. What happened?"

I narrate everything to her and by the time we get to my place she is dying of laughter.

"I knew my aunt was not one to be played with but that was a boss ass move." She says between laughs. "Now I know what I'll do to my boyfriend if he cheats on me."

We get home. I run a bath for Hlelo and put her to sleep. I hope she can atleast sleep a little longer through the night. After we have our dinner we go to sleep. Theres no need for us to even unpack cause we have to go to Makhosi's home tomorrow.

The next day Makhosi comes to pick us up and drives us to his home. When we get there it's busy. Good thing the farm isn't too close to the main house. Although it's visible from the house. He parks the car right by the front door. There is another house next to the main house and a rondavel between the houses.

Makhosi leads us into the main house and we sit in the lounge. Makhosi leaves us saying he will be back. A woman, probably in her late fifties or early sixties walks in. She's pretty, behind her is a girl who looks like her. The woman greets us and sits down just as Makhosi walks back into the lounge. He sits down next to me.

"Ma, this is Tivikele, and this is Hlelolenkosi." He says staring at the sleeping baby. "Your grandbaby." A smile forms on the old woman's face. She gets up and comes close to me.

"Can I?" She asks with her arms open for me to give her Hlelo. I hand Hlelo to her and she goes back to her seat. She starts saying the Khuzwayo clan names while opening up the blankets to look at her properly.

"She's beautiful."

"To think she was almost flushed down a toilet." The girl says. My sisters and I look at each other.

"Zama!" Her mum reprimands her.

"What? I'm just saying. I mean for all we know she could have been searching around for the real baby daddy that's why she told my brother she had an abortion." She says looking at me. I chuckle trying to calm myself down. This girl doesn't know me.

"Zama, please stay out of my business." Makhosi says calmly but I can feel him seething with rage.

"What? I'm just saying...."

"Not now." Her mum snaps.

"I'd like to put her down so she can rest, can you show us where we will sleep." Makhosi gets up and we follow suit. I try to take my baby from his mother but she offers to come with us. This girl side eyes me. If she continues with her little attitude while I'm still here, she will be sorry.

Makhosi and his mother lead us to the other house. We get in and it's beautiful. A bit masculine but nice. It has an open plan design. We are led to a bedroom. I think this is the main bedroom in this house because it has a cot in the corner with all sorts of baby stuff. And I'm guessing it's Makhosi's room too because I can see some male clothes hanging in the slightly open wardrobe.

Mrs Khuzwayo puts Hlelo down on the cot before she walks out leaving me with Makhosi staring at his sleeping daughter.

"I take it that was your sister?" He turns from Hlelo and looks at me.

"I'm sorry about that. She's a little dramatic."

"Dramatic or not. You need to get her on a leash. This is your home and I dont want to find myself doing something that I will regret. Trust me I will." A smile forms in his face.

"Still feisty. I like it. Its sexy." He says before he walks out. Idiot. It's going to be a long four days.

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Unedited

Two days down, two more to go. Although most of Makhosi's family has been welcoming since we got here, it's still not home. We are still guests here and like any guests, we can't just be free and do whatever we want to do whenever we want to. I've spent a better time of our stay here cooped up in doors. Plus it's better this way so I can avoid Zama and her sour attitude. I don't need to be told she doesn't like me, she shows it every time she lays eyes on me.

The house we were given to sleep in turns out it is Makhosi's. Well I already knew that when I saw his clothes in the closet but he confirmed it. Its beautiful. We have been using the kitchen to make our meals, well mostly mine really because I don't want to

trouble anyone, plus Zama and her sour attitude make me rather anxious. I know I'm probably being a snob about it but I would have thought as Hlelo's aunt she would atleast want to get to know her. Ever since we got here she hasnt held her, not even once. The brothers have come to see her and hold her. But not her. It makes me wonder what would happen should anything happen to me or Makhosi. I guess this is the part where I have to be cautious and protective of my child.

Musa and Gcinile went to town to get some fruits and some healthy snacks. I need them if I want to go back to my original body. Although it hasn't been helping because this one is sucking the life out of my boobs so I end up having to eat more just to manufacture more milk. I've become Hlelo's dairy farm and she loves it. Hlelo and I are alone in the house. I switch on the TV after taking a shower and giving her her bath. And now all I have to do is feed her and put her back to sleep.

I sit with her on my lap and give her her boob which she gobbles up like a hungry lion. The front door opens and Zama walks in. Surprise surprise. She walks in and drags a chair from the mini dining table. She places it in front of the TV. Drama, I tell you. I continue to breastfeed Hlelo while staring at this girl. I call her a girl cause even though she is older than me she is still acting like a child.

"I have questions that need answers." That's her greeting. I would say she was clearly not raised right but that would be an insult to Mrs Khuzwayo, judging by her son's and their behavior, she's done a pretty good job of raising her children. I dont know where she went wrong with this one. I keep quiet and look at her waiting for her to continue. "Why did you tell Makhosi you had an abortion?"

"Isnt that a question that should be directed at him?" I reply putting Hlelo on my shoulder to burp her.

"Well I'm asking you, you're the one who lied anyway so.." she shrugs her shoulders and I know that's her

way of saying I should give her an answer.

"Talk to your brother sisi."

"I'm not your sister. Now, here is my theory. I've asked around about you and I've got answers. You are a little whore arent you?" I feel my jaws clench and my anger rising. It's not even noon yet and this girl is here, choosing violence so early in the morning. I keep quiet because I cant wait to hear the rest of what she has to say. "I've been told about your little after work visits to an optometry clinic at the mall. Hlelo is on the lighter side of the spectrum so would I be wrong in thinking she might just be a little Forbes baby?" I can feel my body temperature rising at a rapid pace. It's one thing for her to not like me, that's fine, I'm a big girl I can take it. But to question my child's paternity, now that's just crossing the line.

"Zama, you dont have to like me, that's fine, but questioning my child, now you're crossing the line." She chuckles and shakes her head. I lay the sleeping

Hlelo down on her bassinet and sit back down.

"And you didn't think lying to my brother was crossing the line? Letting him mourn a child he, watching him suffer, that was not crossing the line? And now you are here, trying to pass off this child that has miraculously risen from the dead like Jesus and you expect us to just believe that she is a Khuzwayo? Really?" I'm trying so hard right now to stay calm and remember this is not my home so I can't behave like a straatmate.

"When you're done with your ranting, please leave."

"This is my brothers house. And this is my home. I will leave when I feel like it." Either I am being pranked or the universe is playing a trick on me. I refuse to believe this is real. I get up and pick Hlelo up from her bassinet and we go to the bedroom. If I stay here a minute longer I'll end up doing something I'll regret. And I'm not about that life right now.

I sit in the bedroom watching my baby sleep. I'm not

a saint and I've never pretended to be one. I've made mistakes and some I've owned up to them. And some I've left behind like dust on a gravel road. I may be strong and fearless sometimes but I'm still human, and honestly this hurts. Zama doesn't need to like me or even put up with me, but to reject and question Hlelo's paternity makes me wonder if I did the right thing coming here. Maybe dad was right. I should have just given Hlelo the Majola surname and kept it moving. Now I'm here, being judged and questioned. Who knows who else has heard Zama's theory and what they believe.

Hlelo has been sleeping for almost two hours now and I've been laying next to her. A few minutes ago I heard Makhosi opening the door. I closed my eyes pretending to be asleep. He gave Hlelo a kiss before walking out again. I feel the need to pee so I get off the bed and go to the lone bathroom in this house. I do what I need to do then go back to the bedroom. On my way there I hear the front door opening. I decide to head to the lounge instead, maybe Gcinile

and Musa are back. They've been gone for a while now. Instead of hearing their voices I'm met with Makhosi and Zama's voices while I'm in the passage.

"I dont think we should be talking about this here." She says. I guess whatever they are about to discuss involves me so I should give them space. But my curiosity is at an all time high so I stand by the wall and listen in.

"Just say what you need to say Zama, I have to go talk to dad about this weekend. Tivikele is sleeping."

"Fine. I think you need to do a DNA test on the baby before the ceremony." The thing about eavesdropping is that in order to get the whole idea of what the people are speaking about you have to stay still, but right now I am fighting the urge to march in there and beat the crap out of that girl.

"What are you on about? Hlelo is my child. I dont need a DNA test to tell me that."

"I understand where you're coming from, but ask yourself this, you said the first time you two met you slept together, how many men has she picked up from a club and went home with them?"

"Zama, I know you dont like Tivikele for whatever reason but please dont."

"My dislike for her is nothing compared to my love for you. And all I'm trying to do is look out for you. Did you know that while she was sleeping with you she was also sleeping with Dr Forbes, he is an optometrist, and she was apparently involved with some guy named Andile Khumalo from Durban. The girl has a history with friends with benefits and one night stands. How sure are you that she didnt carry on her little games even when you were together?"

"I'm pretty sure whatever they had ended before we got together. So please."

"Okay, then explain her getting a million dollar contract from Joshua Industries? And the contract was signed in Nigeria where she had to fly too. And she's been going there a lot recently while pregnant.

What if whoever initiated the whole contract is also a potential father." I told you I was being pranked. Girl went from questioning my childs paternity to questioning my business ethics.

"Tivikele is not like that. She wouldn't do something like that. Yes she lied about the abortion but she had her reasons, and the main reason being me hurting her. So maybe she did all that to spite me. You know what they say about a woman scorned."

"Bhuti, scorned women burn clothes or some them in bleach, they slash tires and break windows not lie about a child. And then show up months later with a baby claiming its yours. It doesn't happen like that."

"Like I said, Tivikele is not like that."

"I'm pretty sure you also didn't think she'd hide your child from you but here we are. What if her mum hadn't called you, would she have told you about her or would she let you live in misery mourning a child that might not even be yours? Look, I know you love the baby, we can all see that. But for the sake of

certainty, get the DNA test done so you can have peace of mind." I think I've heard enough.

I turn and tiptoe back to the bedroom. Hlelo is up. Good thing she has her pacifier on otherwise I would not have heard what I just heard. I sit on the bed watching her discover the world around her. My babygirl, I will protect her with every thing inside me. And right now it feels like the first battle I have to fight to protect my baby will be against her own family.

The door slides open and his scent is the first thing that hits my nostrils. Crazy how even with overalls on and smelling like manure his cologne still finds a way to stand out. I didnt realise how sad this whole thing had made me till I felt tears prickling my eyes and my heart breaking. I try to blink the tears away so I can focus on why I'm here. The sooner this ceremony is done the sooner I can go back to my life.

"You're up. How did you sleep?" He asks standing behind me. I guess Zama's influence is really strong, usually when he comes in here his first stop is seeing Hlelo, even when she is asleep he will give her a kiss and then carry on with whatever he was doing. He did it just a few minutes ago and now he is standing behind me, no sign of him even saying hi to his daughter.

"I slept well thank you."

"Are you Okay?" I was hoping my voice would not give away my breaking heart but I guess I didn't hide it enough. I clear my throat and try to get my bearings back to normal.

"I'm fine." He comes around and stands in front of me. He takes one look at Hlelo and then turns to me.

"Your eyes are red. Are you getting enough rest?"

"I'm fine Makhosi." He sighs and fills his pockets with his hands. He is not even going to acknowledge his daughter. Wow.

"Okay then. I have to go do some deliveries in town, will you need anything?"

"No. My sister will be back soon with all I need."

"Right. I'll see you when I come back." And just like that, he leaves.

This has not been the best day. Hlelo has been cranky, I guess she could sense I wasnt okay. It took a while for me to calm her down. And now that she is sleeping again I can digest everything. When Gcinile and Musa came back from their little shopping spree I couldnt bring myself to tell them what happened earlier so I just put a smile on my face and pretended everything was hunky dory.

Musa and Gcinile are in the lounge watching TV. I told them I needed to rest but I've been here just either staring out the window or up at the ceiling trying to figure out everything that happened in the morning. And I still can't wrap my head around it.

I hear a soft knock on the door before it swings open and Makhosi walks in. He has changed from his overalls to casual clothes. He comes and sits on the bed with his back to me and his head down. Again he hasn't even greeted his daughter. I feel my heart break again. I've been here forty eight hours and already things are bad.

"Uhm.... I was speaking to my dad earlier." He starts. I don't know where this conversation is going but I can already tell it won't be good. "Can I ask you something?" I sit up on the bed and look at his back. "How sure are you that Hlelo is mine?" I stare at his back, my pain laced anger rising with each passing second.

"Who is asking? You or Zama?" He turns to look at me. As angry as I am right now I'm surprised at my ability to keep calm.

"You can't blame me for asking can you? You kept

me in the dark for a full nine months making me believe my child was dead, and now...."

"And now I show up with a child claiming it's yours? Is that what you were going to say?" I take a deep breath while we have a staring contest. At this point it's not just my anger making the rounds it's my pride too. "What is it that you want to do Makhosi? You want a DNA test?"

"Would it be a bad thing?" I chuckle and get off the bed.

I find one of Hlelo's onesies and hand it to him.

"She puked on that a just before she fell asleep, I'm sure you'll get a DNA test from it. Unless of course you want blood or saliva. Saliva?" I get her bib and hand it to him. "Theres drool and spit on there so I'm sure that should be enough. Right?"

"Tivikele?"

"Do you need my DNA too just to be sure she is mine? You can never be too sure these days."

"Look, I didn't...."

"Since a paternity test takes more than two days to come out I take it the ceremony will be cancelled?" He doesn't answer. Instead he looks at me like I'm crazy. He might not have answered me but his silence speaks volumes. "I guess I'll be going back to my place then."

"There is no need for that." I get my luggage and start packing. Lucky for me I didn't bring too many clothes. "Tivikele? The ceremony will go ahead."

"No it won't. You'll get the DNA test done, get the results and get your peace of mind."

"We can't cancel the ceremony Tivikele." He says standing up and looking at me as I pack Hlelo's things.

"Of course you can. You want clarity and truth? Then get it. I can't have you looking at my child like she is something dirty and evil."

"I don't think that. For heaven's sake can you stop." I stop and look at him.

"You dont think that? You didn't kiss her this morning when you came to tell me about your deliveries, you came in just now and you didnt kiss her like you usually do. It's barely been eight hours and you already see a question mark on her face. She's no longer Hlelo your baby girl she's now the child who is potentially not yours. It's one thing for you to question me and my choices, but I will not let you play with my child's feelings like a toy. Get your DNA test Makhosi and if you need anything else you know where to find me."

I open the door and poke my head out calling Gcinile. She comes in and looks at the luggage then looks back at me.

"What's going on?" She asks looking from me to Makhosi and back to me.

"Pack your bags, we are going home?"

"What about the ceremony?"

"It's not happening. Please tell Musa to pack her things too. We need to go before it's late. We can't drive late with a baby in the car."

"Uhm. Okay." She walks back out.

"Tivikele you're being unreasonable right now." I pick the sleeping baby out of the crib and wrap her up in her blanket.

"Unreasonable would be me forcing my child into a family that doesn't want her. Get your DNA test done Makhosi and then we will take it from there. But just so you know, once I walk out that door I'm not coming back here again. Maybe my dad was right."

"Hold up. What do you mean by that? You can't" he is disturbed by Musa coming into the room. She takes the packed luggage and walks out again.

"Tivikele!"

"Step 1, get your DNA done. Everything else will be determined by the outcome of that test."

I walk out with him calling my name. By the time I get outside the family is standing outside watching Musa and Gcinile pack our luggage. I open the back door and strap Hlelo in.

"KaMajola, what's going on? Why are you leaving?" I didn't notice his mum coming to the car. Once Hlelo is strapped in I turn to look at her.

"Ma, thank you for your hospitality, you've been very kind. I'm sorry we have to go, Makhosi will explain everything." I get in the car and close the door. Musa and Gcinile get in the car with Gcinile in the drivers seat. As we drive out Zama's smug face bids us goodbye.

"What just happened?" Gcinile asks as we drive out of the yard.

Honestly, I'm still trying to wrap my head around what just happened myself. But all I know is that all

this is a culmination of one stupid mistake I made in a club. One too many drinks and I got my heart drunk in love, and now I'm here, having a paternity issue in my hand. If this is what love does to people then I don't want it. I've said it before and I'll say it again, Love is a scam.

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Unedited

"Baby!"

I've never been so happy to hear my mums voice. I wipe the tears sneaking out of my eyes and sit up on the bed. Hlelo is not on her crib. Either Musa or Gcinile took her. I look up at my mum and she walks closer and takes a seat next to me.

"I didn't know you were coming." She gives me a hug and I lay my head on her lap.

"Judging by the puffy red eyes I might just be a little late. What happened?" I tell her everything that happened. I'm not sure what she feels because she is silent. After about a couple of minutes of silence

she sighs. "Okay then. So when are you going for the DNA testing?"

"When I left I gave him some stuff that has Hlelo's DNA, if he wants a fresh sample he will let me know."

"So you don't have a problem with the DNA?" She asks sounding surprised.

"No. I know for a fact Hlelo is his child, my issue is how easy it was for his sister to influence his decision and how cold he became after that. Before he spoke to his sister no one could tell him different. He was certain Hlelo is his child, I mean no sane person would go pay inhlawulo for a child whose paternity was being questioned. And then he says we should stay for imbeleko. How when he has doubts?" I sit up and look at her. "Was I wrong for leaving?" If there is anyone who will tell me the truth it's her. One of the things I appreciate about my mother is her ability to call out bullshit regardless of who it is.

"No, you were not wrong. I get you wanting to leave a place where you are not wanted and I understand you wanting to protect your child, who knows what that girl would have done." I sigh and put my mind at rest. For the past three days I've been questioning my leaving. All I could think about was what if my leaving gave Zama more ammunition against me? Even though I care very little about her opinion I almost feel like I disrespected Mr and Mrs Khuzwayo. I just hope they can find it in their hearts to forgive me.

"Does dad know what happened?"

"No. Gcinile just said you need me she didnt tell me the whole story so there was nothing I could tell him." Thank God. As stubborn and protective as he is, I'm not ready for him to tell me he told me so. If aid just listened to him and gave Hlelo the Majola surname we wouldnt be having these issues now. But like the first time when I was blinded by love, this time I got blinded by Makhosi's excitement at being a father. And for a moment I felt bad for denying him

a chance to be a part of the pregnancy. Just for a sweet moment. But its passed now so I'm good.

I got up and took a shower while mum went to bond with her granddaughter. I finish taking my shower and put on some shorts and an oversized tshirt. I join them in the lounge and already my mother is busy cooking her Sunday best. This house already smells like heaven.

I pick Hlelo up from her rocking chair and feed her. When I'm done I change her and put her to sleep. She's so peaceful when she is sleeping. One thing I'm grateful for right now is that she is too little to know what is going on around her. By the time this whole paternity issue is over and done with she won't even hear a whiff about it. Unless of course dearest aunt decides to fill her in.

Once she is asleep I put her in her bassinet and join the girls in the kitchen. We cook together with jokes

and laughs in between. Even my puffy red eyes are slowly fading. When we are done cooking we set the table to have a proper lunch. Just as we sit down to eat we hear a knock on the door. Musa gets up to open and and she comes back with Mabutho behind her.

"Hello family." He takes a seat while Musa sets a place for him. "So, care to explain." He says stuffing himself with a drumstick and staring at me.

"Explain what?"

"Why the ceremony didn't happen yesterday." I shrug my shoulders and continue eating. "That's not an answer. What happened?" Knowing him, he wont rest till he gets an answer. But I also know once he knows the truth chances are he might just cause unnecessary drama.

"Hlelo fell sick. She had to be rushed to the hospital." Musa tells him. Thank God for her quick thinking.

"Oh, what was wrong with her?"

"Just a little fever, nothing to worry about." Mum says.

"Okay. So, when will you have it then?"

"I dont know. We will see what the Khuzwayo's say."

"Right. So Crystal and I broke up. Do we have beer in this house?" He gets up and heads to the kitchen. Who drops a bomb like that and then continues on like nothing happened?

He comes back with a glass of wine. There is a whole bottle on the table but he went and opened another. I guess that's his way of not wanting to talk about it. But I'll dig it out of him later. We have our lunch. But then I remember I have to go to home affairs tomorrow, in actual fact Makhosi and I were supposed to go together. But now with all this drama, I'm not even sure what will happen.

After lunch we clean up and mum goes to take a nap with Hlelo. Musa and Gcinile go down to the pool to

take some 'content' for Instagram. Influencer lives I tell you. I make two cups of hot chocolate and hand one to Mabutho. We sit in the lounge staring at the blank TV in silence just sipping our hot chocolate.

"I'm beginning to think I'll die alone." He laughs. One check for me. I got him to laugh.

"One heartbreak and you're giving up on love? I never figured you for a quitter."

"Sometimes it's better to quit while you're ahead. All I need to do now is focus on Hlelo and my business and just forget about everything else."

"What if we never find it?" He asks sounding a bit more serious and hurt.

"What?"

"The kind of love that mum and dad have. What if we never get to have it? All of us are just living with no clue what we are doing. I thought Crystal was it for me but now she's gone."

"And I thought Makhosi was my happily ever after.

Even after I found out about his little bet and me telling him I had an abortion I had hope you know. I couldn't go through with the abortion because I wasn't ready to lose him. I was angry yes but I had a baby, a living breathing reminder of what we had, no matter how fake, Hlelo was the reminder I needed to know it was real. But after what happened, I need to just forget about Makhosi and I ever having a future." I sigh and lay my head on his shoulder. "My problems aside, Crystal never deserved you." He chuckles.

"And why didn't you tell me this before?"

"Because you were happy. You loved her and even though it's over now you can atleast hold on to the knowledge that you did your best."

"I guess my best wasn't good enough for her."

"It will be good enough for somebody else. One day you'll meet someone who will love you for the incredible man that you are. Trust me, it will happen."

"Thank you sis. Maybe you should also remember those words too." Yeah no, I'm good. I'm done with

men. I was better off when I never attached feelings to a person.

A horizontal line of 20 black dots, evenly spaced, representing a sequence or a series of items.

MAKHOSI

"I'm an idiot, aren't I?"

"I never say this to my patients but, yes, you're an idiot." Trust Dr Mashaba to say that.

"A professional doctor would not say that." He laughs and sips his drink. I've been laying on his couch for the past hour trying to make sense of how things got here. And all I can come up with is that I allowed myself to be manipulated. But I'm a man right, and a man takes responsibility for his choices.

Nine months ago I thought getting Tivikele back would be an uphill battle, a far fetched dream but it

became attainable a couple of weeks back. I was so close to having it all, the love of my life and our daughter were right there, for me to take, but I fucked it up. And now I'm here, alone, again. I feel like such an idiot.

"I'm beginning to think you like messing things up for yourself." He says bringing me back to the present.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"For the past few months you've been patiently waiting for her to come back, you were hopeful despite everything and she did come back, now you're here. Why did you ask her for the DNA test?"

"I just needed clarity that's all. I didn't mean to offend her."

"But you were certain the baby was yours a few hours before you asked her for the DNA test. I refuse to believe that you did a whole one eighty in a matter of minutes nje out of the blue. What changed?"

In all honesty I don't know what changed either, my biggest regret right now is taking my frustrations out on Hlelo. I didn't even get to kiss her goodbye or tell her I love her. I let my own issues get in the way of my relationship with my child. Although DNA results are still pending I have to believe Hlelo is mine. I have to.

After a bunch of questions that I couldn't answer, I say my goodbyes and head out. I start at the club and check on things before going home. Somewhere along the way I make a detour and head to Tivi's place. I'm not even sure if she will pick up my calls but I have to try anyway. I call her, she hasn't blocked me so that's good.

"Makhosi." She answers literally after the first ring. Either she's not angry anymore or she's up to something. Yes, I'm paranoid clearly.

"Hi. Can I come up to see you?" Silence. My heart starts racing, I need to see Hlelo. I miss her.

"Meet me in the coffee shop downstairs." She answers after a while.

"I don't mind coming up."

"I'll see you downstairs."

"Okay." She hangs up.

I park the car in the visitors zone and go into the building. The coffee shop isn't too busy so that's good. I order a cup of coffee and wait for her. She shows up a few minutes later. Alone. I was hoping she would bring Hlelo but she didn't. She sits down across from me.

"Hello." She sounds so, indifferent. I could handle anger, but this person sitting before me right now doesn't seem to care. She looks different, her eyes are a bit puffy and they aren't as white as they usually are.

"Hi. Where is Hlelo?"

"She's sleeping. Why are you here Makhosi?"

"I wanted to see you guys." She chuckles and crosses her arms.

"Did you get your test results back?"

"No."

"Then why are you here?" I sigh and sip my coffee.

"Tivikele, you really cant blame me for wanting to know the truth."

"I don't blame you. We all need the truth." Okay I was expecting a fight there.

"So you do understand?"

"Of course I understand. You want the truth and its your right to get it. What I have a problem with is how easy it was for your feelings to change towards Hlelo. In just a few minutes you went from kissing her and telling her you love her to being cold. When the results come back proving that Hlelo is yours what is going to happen? What happens if your next girlfriend tells you she doesnt like you spending time with Hlelo, will you cut her off just like that?"

"Of course not. That's not going to happen."

"If you say so."

"Tivikele, I'm sorry, I know I went about things the wrong way."

"It's fine. Is that all?" Honestly I'd take the angry cussing Tivikele right now, then I'd know her real feelings. Right now I'm not sure where her head space is at.

"Are we still going to home affairs tomorrow?"

"Get the results first Makhosi, I wouldn't want you to give your last name to a child that is not yours. I need to go before Hlelo wakes up." She stands up and takes her phone. I watch her walk away. Yeah my chances of getting her back are below zero.

I pay for my coffee and head home. It's dark by the time I get there. I go to my house and head straight to the bedroom. Her crib is still here and so are some of her clothes. Her tiny little clothes. I wonder

if she'll use the crib again. Someone knocks on the slightly open door. Sphetho walks in.

"Hey, uma no baba want to see you." He announces.

"Why?"

"Just come." He walks out and I follow him. Old as I am whenever my parents call me I get a big nervous. And right now I know whatever it is it's not good. I get to the lounge in the main house and everyone is here. This is serious. I take a seat and wait for someone to break the ice.

"I just got a call from Mr Majola, he spoke to his wife and now they want to know when they can bring back the cows?" He says staring at me. He is angry, that much I can tell.

"Cows for what?"

"The ones you paid for inhlawulo. He wants to know when they can bring them back since you dont think Hlelo is your child." I was hoping this wouldn't

escalate to this.

"They can bring them back anytime. They should have never been paid to begin with." Zama says.

"Zama shut up." Mum says.

"I'm just saying."

"There is no need for them to bring them back Baba."

"And what happens if the child is not yours. No, they will bring them back." I close my eyes trying to calm myself down. I'm not in the mood to fight with Zama right now. Someone throws something at me. I open my eyes and find an envelope on my lap.

"What's this?"

"The clinic delivered those earlier since you paid for them to be fast tracked. Open them." I look at the envelope in my hand. My heart says this is unnecessary, but logic says otherwise. With the silence in the room right now you could hear a pin drop. I take a deep breath and tear the envelope. I

take out the peace of paper inside. And right there, in black and white, she is mine. I should be relieved. I should be happy, but I know right now that steep hill I was ready to climb just became an impossible mountain to climb.

"So what do the results say?" My brother Zimele asks. Sphetho grabs the paper from my hand and reads it.

"Hlelolenkosi is a Khuzwayo." He throws the envelope to Zama. "Are you happy now Aunty?" Zama takes the paper and reads it.

"Okay then." She says. "Now that that has been sorted, we can have the ceremony."

"Just like that?" Dad asks.

"Of course. Now the truth is out so we can go ahead and get Hlelo introduced to her ancestors."

"I have a question." Phila interjects. She's not one to talk just for the sake of it so I know whatever she's

going to ask has been thought out. "What would MakaHlelo gain by lying about Hlelo's paternity?" She is staring at Zama waiting for an answer.

"What else except a father for her child and money. That's why most women lie, money." Sphetho chuckles and turns to Zama.

"Money? You do realise Tivikele could pay you double your salary every week for a year and still be able to afford to live. Her entire family is educated and well off and you're telling me she wanted money? Sometimes I wonder how your mind works sis wam." He gets up and leaves.

"Well she cant buy a father for the child so..."

"You're amazing you know that. Both of you." Dad says moving his eyes from me to Zama and back to me. "Makhosi when are you going to grow a backbone? One moment you claim to love this girl and you say you want a life with her and then you allow Zama to make you doubt something you already knew in your heart."

"Baba, I'll fix this."

"Right." He gets up and leaves and his wife follows.

"So what are you going go to do Bhuti?" Phila asks me.

"I dont know Phila. I really dont know." I get up and head back to my room. I take my phone and call Tivikele.

"Makhosi, it's late."

"I know, uhm I wanted to tell you I got the results. Hlelo is mine."

"Congratulations. What would you like me to do? Throw a party?"

"I'm sorry Tivikele. Can I come see you."

"Its late."

"I know. I'll be quick, I promise, I just want to see her."

"Like I said, its late. I'll get my lawyer to draw up a custody agreement and then we can take it from

there."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"It means Makhosi we need to have a clear understanding on how we will co parent from now on. Unfortunately you and I will be tied to each other for the next whatever years so we need to have a structure in place to figure out how we are going to do this? Goodnight." She hangs up leaving me somehow unsure of how to react.

Maybe dad is right, I do need to grow a backbone. But it might just be a little too late.

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Unedited

Tell me what goes on in a baby's head when they decide to wake up and do nothing in the middle of the night when every one is sleeping? Someone please explain it to me because I dont get it. I'm dead tired, well technically speaking I should be grateful really because I've spent a majority of the time, since Hlelo was born with my family next to me. I should be happy, right? But I'm not, I think I'm more emotionally drained than physically. But looking at this gorgeous face in front of me makes things better.

Since Hlelo decided we will hold a night virgil tonight I might as well go through property websites and try to find a house for us. And speaking of houses I

need to sell the other apartment so I can put down that money as a deposit. I guess its true what they say, when all is quiet in the middle of the night your thoughts take over.

I decide to go through social media, I know something will bore me to death there and I can get some sleep. Hlelo is fed and changed all that's left is for her to stop fighting sleep. I decide to start on WhatsApp watching people's statuses. A message comes through. I go back to my chats and it's a message from Makhosi. A smile creeps up on face when I remember how we used to do this, when I couldnt sleep he would chat to me and even send me voice notes of his singing just so I could sleep. But now all that is a distant memory. How quickly things change.

I open the message and all it says is 'why are you not sleeping?'. I feel like blue ticking him but I know that's just rude.

'Hlelo woke me up.' I press send and hope he doesn't respond. But he does.

'Is she okay?' Okay maybe I shouldn't have said anything about Hlelo because it will just prolong the conversation.

'She's fine. She was just hungry.' I hope that's the end of that conversation but who am I kidding. I opened the can of worms as soon as I replied to his first message.

'I wish I was there to help you.' How do I even respond to that? A few days ago I would have been all giddy and happy about that and i would have even told him to come by, but now, now I'm not sure how I feel.

'I should try and get some sleep. Goodnight.' I press send and get off WhatsApp.

Since WhatsApp didn't help I go to Twitter and go through the hashtags but nothing, just a bunch of

savage people. I guess facebook will have to do the trick. I log onto Facebook and that's a dead end. People are sleeping. And so is this one. I put the phone down and take her and place her in her crib. Hopefully she sleeps for more than two hours.

I get back on the bed and go through my phone again. There is another message from Makhosi.

'Can I come see you tomorrow?' If I blue tick him now I can wake up tomorrow and say I didn't see the message. Yeah, that's a better option. Right? Yeah. I toss the phone aside and switch the side lamp off. I'm not ready to see him, I saw him yesterday and it took every ounce of strength in me to even be in his presence. I wish my head and my heart could be in alignment because right now I dont know how I'm supposed to feel. Logic tells me I should just cut ties with him and focus on my baby but, the heart, like a runaway train refuses to listen to reason until it crashes. Somewhere somehow in my musings sleep

takes over.

I wake up in the morning to the sound of the bedroom door opening. I slightly open my eyes to see my dad top toeing in. He goes straight for the crib and picks Hlelo up.

"Hi munchkin, grandpa missed you." I watch him dancing around with her in his arms. He can pretend to be tough all he wants but right now, he is just a big teddy bear. He plays with her for a while before walking out with her in his arms.

I take my phone and check the time. It's almost 7 AM. I get up and go to pee. I brush my teeth and wash face before joining the rest of the family in the lounge. My dad wasn't here before I went to sleep but now he is here, and he is not alone. He is with my two uncles and my aunt. I greet and head to the kitchen where mum, Musa and Gcinile are.

"What's going on? What's with the entourage?"

"They are going to the Khuzwayo's." Musa whispers next to me. I look at mum and she just shrugs her shoulders. They can't do that. Why are they even going there.

"Why?" My eyes are directed at my mother. If anyone should have the answers it's her.

"To fix things." She answers.

"There is nothing to fix. Makhosi got the DNA tests and he knows the truth so there is nothing to be fixed."

"Of course there is something to be fixed." Dad answers coming from behind me.

"Baba! Please."

"Please what? If you had done what I told you to do and given Hlelo the Majola surname we wouldn't be in this mess right now."

"Really? So now it's all my fault?"

"Of course not. But if you had listened to me we wouldnt be running up and down trying to solve your issues." Wow. Okay. "We have to get going. We still have to drive back to KZN." I keep quiet while he talks to his wife. I was hoping she would talk some sense into him but I guess she agrees with him.

Dad and my uncles take their leave. I wonder if Makhosi knows that they are coming. I get my phone and reply to his message asking to see me. I tell him to meet me at the mall in an hour. I get off the chair to go get ready. I get Hlelo ready and strap her into her stroller. She's just fallen asleep so that gives me plenty of time to get ready. I put on some Jean's and an oversized tshirt since my little fupa hasnt gone back to its original state yet.

I push Hlelo out and find mum still in the kitchen. Musa and Gcinile are nowhere to be found.

"You going somewhere?" Mum asks. I turn to look at

her.

"Yes, I need some fresh air."

"Okay." She turns back to her pots.

"Ma, why didnt you tell me dad was coming?"

"Because whatever he has to sort out has nothing to do with you."

"Really? Isn't he going to sort out 'my issues'?"

"Tivikele, let it go. The elders will sort everything out."

"What's there to sort out mama. Makhosi knows Hlelo is his, he got the test results I told you that so why is dad here?" She closes the pots and turns back to me.

"Tivikele, what is it exactly that you want? Cause I don't think you know either. Last night you were going on about lawyers and custody agreements and today you're off to see your boyfriend before anything is sorted. What exactly must happen? What do you want?" I sigh and push Hlelo out the door.

I drive to the mall and quickly find a table at Mugg n Bean. I order a cup of tea and a muffin and wait. Makhosi is late.

"So it is true. You had a baby." A voice disturbs me from my thoughts. I look up and find Kevin standing there.

"Dr Forbes. How are you?" He takes a seat across from me.

"I'm good. I thought the rumours were just that, rumours. But I see they are true." He is looking at the sleeping baby with a smile on his face.

"Well, life happened."

"I can see that. So how's motherhood treating you?"

"Urgh, it has its ups and downs. But more ups than downs."

"I can imagine. Khuzwayo is a lucky man." I fake a smile and sip my tea. "Are you Okay?" He asks looking at me with a frown on his face.

"I'm fine. How is work going?" He chuckles.

"It's good." He looks down at Hlelo who is waking up. He takes the pacifier and puts it in her mouth and she goes back to sleep. "She's beautiful. But then again she is yours. It's a pity you and I didn't make our own." I sip my tea and pretend I did not just hear that.

"Can we talk about something else." He laughs and crosses his arms on the table.

"Like what?" I figure I need advice on everything that's been going on. And someone who isn't closely connected to me or my situation will have better advice to give.

"Can I get your advice on something?"

"Sure." I tell him everything leaving out the bet part.
"Wow, okay. That's a lot."

"I know. So what do you think?"

"Well, do you want me to be honest or do you want me to tell you what you want to hear?"

"Honesty will do. I just need someone else's opinion

other than my family or friends."

"Okay, firstly, your dad was right, you should have listened to him. But I also understand that you wanted to give Makhosi a chance to do right by his child. And to some extent, he did. But you can't blame him for having questions about the baby's dna, you lied to him and then showed up at nine months with a baby on tow, granted your mother initiated the whole reunion, But still, it happened. And as for your father going to Makhosi's family, somethings just need the elders to sort out. They paid damages to your father so if they now have questions about the baby he has a right to sort things out so that tomorrow they don't come back and say he accepted cows for a child that's not theirs. As much as you will be deemed the liar if the baby is not his he will be considered just as complacent for accepting the damages. My advice, give the baby her rightful surname and let her be introduced to her ancestors."

"Wow, for a coloured guy you sure know a lot about

culture." He chuckles and takes a bite of my muffin. "My mum is black remember. Anyways I have to go, I have an appointment in five minutes. I'll see you around." I get up and give him a hug. He leaves and I sit back down getting ready to call Makhosi when I feel someone else's presence next to me. I look up to find Zama standing there with her judgemental face.

"You're incredible you know that."

"What do you want Zama?" She takes a seat on the chair that Kevin just left.

"So you came here to meet up with Dr Forbes and you figured bringing my brothers child would be a good idea?" This girl, yes I'll refer to her as a girl until she grows up.

"Yeah so, how's that your problem?"

"The baby is barely a month old and you're now parading her to your men." She says with so much disgust in her voice.

"Since when do you care what I do with my child?"

"You mean my brothers child?"

"Your brothers child? Wow. Weren't you not convinced a few days ago that she wasnt your brothers child?" She swallows and stares at me.

"Listen to me Zama, I'm not sure what kind of hold you have over your brother but please make sure it stays kini (in your home.) I kept my cool when you disrespected me in your father's house but remember right now we are not in your father's house. So please do me a favor leave me and my child alone." She opens her mouth to say something but a voice above us stops her.

"Hey, sorry I'm late. Zama, what are you doing here?" Zama gets up and stands next to her brother.

"I was just talking to your baby mama."

"About what?"

"Her little get together with Dr Forbes earlier." They both look at me expecting an answer. And they get

none. I'm not about to explain myself to them.

"You said you wanted to see me, so I'm here. What do you need?"

"Dont change the subject." Zama says between gritted teeth.

"You know I'm beginning to think there is more to this over protective hold you have over your brother, are you sure you dont want to be the one sleeping with him?"

"How dare you." She is angry. Well so am I and I'm not about to let her disrespect more than she already has.

"Zama go home." Makhosi instructs her quietly but clearly effective cause she grabs her bag and walks out seething. Makhosi sits down.

"What the fuck was that?" I can see he is just as angry.

"You said you wanted to see me. I'm here." He sighs and calls the waiter over. He orders and cup of

coffee then turns back to me.

"When are we going to home affairs for Hlelo's birth certificate?"

"Tomorrow is fine by me."

"Okay. I'll pick you up in the morning."

"Fine by me, is that all you wanted to say?" He stares at me silently for a while before turning to Hlelo. He picks her up and plays with her.

"She's grown." He says looking at her. I watch him play with her and wonder how he could easily go cold on her when he had doubts about her paternity and now he is here, like nothing happened. "Your dad was at home earlier." He says not taking his eyes off of her.

"I know."

"Why is he so dramatic? Why would he want to bring back inhlawulo?"

"Maybe you should have asked him about it. How did the meeting go anyway?"

"Fine. They are waiting for us to set a date for imbeleko. I was thinking anytime in the next month."

"A year from now will be fine." His eyes shoot up like a arrow out of a bow.

"A year? Are you for real?"

"Yes. It will be part of the custody agreement. And as part of the custody agreement, Zama is not allowed a where near my child, so if she decides to visit your family home, Zama is not allowed to be anywhere close to her. And since Hlelo is still too little to spend weekends away from me you'll have to spend the weekends when you have her at my place. Of course once she turns one then she can spend weekends at your place. My lawyer will iron out the details and then you can get your lawyer to look it over." He chuckles and turns back to Hlelo.

"I also have my own terms, for your peace of mind I'll keep Zama away from Hlelo, but as for my weekends, she will spend them at my home with my family...."

"Will you breastfeed her?"

"You interrupted me I wasn't done. As I was saying. Baby's can exclusively breastfeed for six months, after that there is nothing stopping us from putting her on formula which will allow her to spend time with her other side of the family. As for imbeleko, it will happen in the next month and that's that on that."

"My daughter is not going on formula, not while I still have milk coming out of my breasts. And like I said, imbeleko will happen a year from now."

"Are we seriously going to fight about this?"

"No. I said what I said and that's it."

"I don't get it. A week ago you were ready to have the ceremony and now what's changed?"

"You did. I need to get back home."

"What were you and Dr Forbes talking about?"

"Nothing for you to concern yourself about."

"Are you sleeping with him?"

"Makhosi, what I do, when I do it and who I do it with is none of your business. You do you and I'll do me. Your only concern should be Hlelo."

"I love you."

"We need to go. My lawyer will be in touch." He puts Hlelo back in her stroller.

"I mean it Tivikele. I know I'm not your favourite person right now but I do love you. And I'll make things right. I promise." I've heard that before.

I push the stroller out of the restaurant and head home. I get home and the noise is deafening. But as soon as I walk in they keep quiet.

"You're back. Perfect. Take a seat." My dad says. I take a seat next to mom. "Mr Khuzwayo and I have spoken. We have decided that imbeleko will happen in two weeks time and Hlelo will carry the Khuzwayo surname since damages and everything has been

paid. You and Makhosi will stay away from each other, Mrs Khuzwayo will be the one who picks up and drops off Hlelo if there is a need."

"So mine and Makhosi's opinions mean nothing."

"You act like kids you get treated as such. Until you and your little boyfriend grow up and act like parents we will make the decisions for you. Now go get ready, you're spending the next few days with the Khuzwayo's, the grandparents want to see their grandbaby." I'm seriously being tested right now.

How is it that I can run a multimillion rand company but get home and be treated like a little teenager. Where is the fairness in that?

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Unedited

I am 28 years old, about to be 29, I am a mother, I run a successful, international IT company, underline international. I have people who look to me to lead them and they take instructions from me, they quiver sometimes when I appear, but I get home and some old man wants to tell me how to live my life, granted he is my father but still, he is an old man and he has no right to tell me what to do with my life. None whatsoever.

I've been in my room sulking ever since that old man told me I would be spending time with Makhosi's family. His parents are nice so I don't mind them, his siblings too, except that devil named Zama. I dont know why that woman doesnt like me but right now I

don't care cause I don't like her either so spending time in her polluted presence will just drive me nuts.

I have packed my bags and they are sitting pretty on the bed. Hlelo's luggage is also packed and ready to go but I do not have the energy to walk out of here. I take my phone and dial Makhosi's number. Maybe he can get through to his parents and let them know this is not on.

"Hello."

"You need to put your parents on a leash and I'll do the same with mine."

"I dont understand."

"Apparently your parents and mine agreed that I should come with Hlelo and spend the next few days at your house possibly until imbeleko is done in about two weeks."

"Oh. I thought it was just a couple of days."

"Wait, they told you?"

"Yes. My dad called me an hour ago and told me." He sounds way too excited for his own good. I'm about to burst his bubble.

"I'm not doing it. I'm not going."

"Why?"

"I dont have the time or energy to deal with your annoying sister." He sighs.

"Okay tell you what, come to the club with your bags and we will figure something out."

"Whatever that something is it better not involve me going to your home cause it's not happening."

"Just come over."

"Fine. I'll be there in twenty minutes."

"Perfect."

I hang up and drag my bags out to the lounge.

"I'm ready." I announce. My dad turns around and looks at my Jean's.

"You should wear a skirt." He says and everyone seems to agree with him. Not in this lifetime. I'm not a Makoti I'm just a baby mama. I'll leave the skirts and aprons to the future Mrs Khuzwayo.

"I prefer my Jean's thank you very much." I call Musa and Gcinile and they help me with the bags. Hlelo is strapped into her stroller. I say my goodbyes and walk out with my sister and cousin behind me. I say my goodbyes to them then drive off.

Twenty minutes later I park outside the club. I text Makhosi and tell him I'm outside. He comes and opens the drivers side of the car and tells me to scoot over. I'm in no fighting mood so I scoot over. He starts the car and drives out of the club.

"Where are we going?"

"Home affairs." I look at my watch and its thirty minutes before home affairs closes. I wonder what kind of miracle he thinks he can conjure up to make this happen. When we get to home affairs it's a little

quiet and people are already gone, although it's still open I can count the people inside on the one hand. I take a seat while Makhosi calls someone.

A guy comes out from one of the offices. He walks over to Makhosi and they greet each other. He introduces me to him and he leads us back to his office. Thank God there arent that many people here, imagine us walking in last and being helped first. I promise you corruption is rife in this country.

Thirty minutes later Hlelolenkosi Asiphile Khuzwayo has been officially registered at home affairs. Atleast my dad got to give her her second name since he couldnt give her his last name. And me, her own mother, all I did was push her out, no naming her whatsoever. But I love her names so it's all good.

"So what now? Where are we going?" I ask him seeing as we are already done with this one thing.

"Patience Miss Majola, patience." He answers with a mischievous smile on his face. For a moment I remember how I fell in love with him. But lucky for me I have Hlelo to bring me back to earth. She starts crying and I know either she is hungry or wet, or both.

Makhosi parks the car on the side of the road and I get off and get in the back. I change her while we wait. Makhosi starts driving while I feed her. When she is full and burped I strap her back onto her car seat. I sit in the back distracting Hlelo until she falls asleep. When I look up I see Makhosi joining the N12.

"Where are we going?" He looks at me through the rearview mirror and I again cant help feeling like he is up to no good.

"Limpopo." Okay I know I said I didnt want to spend time with his family but why would he take us to Limpopo?

"Why?"

"Well since you didn't want to spend time with my family I figured we could fly to Cape Town or Limpopo and Limpopo won."

"I still don't understand."

"I have a game farm there so we can stay as long as we want."

"Since when do you have a game farm?"

"I'm more of a silent partner. A friend of mine owns the place I just invested in it."

"Mhmm." He looks at me on the mirror and I just turn to look out the window. His friends are not really my favourite people so I don't know if I want to be in the presence of even one of them right now.

Sleep took over an hour into the drive. I wake up a couple of hours later and the car is parked at a garage and I'm alone in the car. Panic takes over. What if Makhosi dumped me here and took my child to only God knows where. I look at the time and it's almost five in the evening, it will get dark soon. I get

off the car and look around a bit. I dont see him. But we are at a garage, maybe he went inside. My heart starts racing. What if this was his plan all along, get me away from my family and then take my child from me. I know I overthink a lot but right now I cant help it. I don't know where my child is.

I close the car door and quickly run inside the garage. He is not there. I swear my heart is going to jump out of my chest. I get out and head back to the car. No car keys. I take my phone and call him and his phone rings in the car. Jesus, am I being tested right now. I cant even call home cause I'm not supposed to be here. What have I done?

I feel tears fill up my eyes. Where could they be. I say a silent prayer asking God to please bring him back with my child. I know it's his child too but still, I want my baby back. I slip down next to the car and sit flat on the tar trying so hard not to sob. I need to figure out where my child could be.

"Are you Okay?" I look up and he is standing there with Hlelo in his arms and a blanket over her. Oh God. I quickly get up and take her from him and open the blanket. She is up and sucking on her tiny fingers. She's hungry. I take my boob out and help her latch on and she sucks like it's the last time she will see a boob. "What's wrong with you?" He asks with a frown on his face.

"Where the heck have you been? Where did you take my child?" I hiss at him just so I dont attract any attention to us. He lifts the takeaway bag and I feel like the dumbest human to ever walk planet earth at this very moment. Can I blame hormones even after the fact?

"Where did you think I went." Shame washes over me like a hurricane. I should seriously learn to stop thinking the worst when it comes to him. "You thought I kidnapped my own child?" He asks through gritted teeth. As much as he is angry there is a bit of

hurt in his voice.

"Of course not. I just.... I just..... I panicked when I didnt find her in the car."

"And your first thought was that I kidnapped her right? Really Tivikele, I know you think you can't trust me but newsflash, Hlelo is my child too. And I didn't want to wake you cause you seemed tired. Excuse me for being a parent to my own child." He throws the takeaways inside the car and then goes around to the drivers side and gets in and bangs the door. My poor car.

I shamelessly stand there for a few more minutes before he honks the horn. I open the backseat door.

"Can you get in the car so we can go." Great job Tivikele. You just ruined the trip. I get in the car and he starts the car and drives off.

"I'm sorry." He ignores me. I know he is not at liberty to forgive me but can he atleast acknowledge my apology? No? Maybe? I guess not.

I strap Hlelo in and quietly sit there like a naughty child. My stomach grumbles at the smell of whatever is in that bag. If its scent is anything to go by then I know it's good. I try to ignore my stomach but I'm a breastfeeding new mother who hasnt eaten in more than four hours and my stomach is there to remind me of it.

"Can you please just eat, your stomach is making noise." Pride aside I take the bag and open it. There are a couple of burgers and some ribs. I take the covered burger and hold it next to him. If he takes it then he is probably quarter to forgiving me, and if he doesn't, well I guess I'm screwed. He doesnt take it.

I open it and eat it. My stomach grumbles one last time as a thank you. I eat as quietly as I can because at this point I'm trying to avoid anything that might make him more upset. When I'm done eating I gulp down a bottle of water and sit back on the seat.

We pull up to this rustic rural looking gate with a huge sign saying no trespassing on it and the name of the game farm. I know they say dont judge a book by its cover but this place looks a bit dodgy. The security opens the gate and we drive for a few minutes before we are welcomed by the most beautiful place. Yeah I should have kept my judgement to myself.

He parks in front of the reception area and its bright and beautiful. If I had to rate the place from first look I'd give it a ten out of ten. Well eight if we include the entrance. I open the door to get out but he stops me.

"Stay in the car I'm just getting the keys." I close the door and wait. He goes to the reception and unfortunately for me I can see him from here. The girl at the front desk has a huge grin on her face and she keeps tucking her five rand shop weave to the back of her ear. Where is her dignity, flirting with a man she just met. That's not even unprofessional it's

just plane disrespectful. Don't ask to who, it just is.

Makhosi comes back whistling and humming a song. Clearly he was flirting back too. Idiot. He starts the car and drives to our chalet. He gets off first and opens the boot. He takes out the bags and a gentleman comes and helps us into the chalet. I get out of the car and by the time I crouch back in to get Hlelo he is already unstrapping her. He sees me looking at him.

"Do I have your permission to take MY CHILD into the chalet?" He asks making sure I hear the my child part. Petty much. I inwardly roll my eyes and get my head out of the car. I wait for him to lead the way inside. He goes and opens the door. I walk in and the place is beautiful. Except it has one bed and a cot next to it which I'm guessing he requested. Maybe there is another chalet he booked for himself.

"So where are you going to sleep?" He places Hlelo

on the cot and turns to look at me before looking at the bed.

"I'll sleep on the bed." No, no, no. I refuse. He cannot do this to me.

"Okay so where am I going to sleep?"

"The bed is big enough for two people." Oarabile is surely whizzing by testing me. Cause there is no way he just said that.

"You cant possibly be serious."

"Well if you dont like the bed then there is the couch or the floor. It's all up to you."

He pulls off his tshirt revealing his well sculpted body, not the six pack body but the one with a bit of a collar box for the six pack just reminding you that he knows the entrance of a gym but it's not his priority. I swallow while my eyes run all over him. I'm not sure if its cerebos taking its tall on me or what but I could swear I felt something drip onto my underwear. I feel his fingers on my chin as he closes

my drooling mouth.

"You're drooling." He whispers in my face with a smirk on his lips and I feel his warm breath on me. Shame makes way for embarrassment as i watch him walk away to what I assume is a bathroom. As soon as he closes the door behind him I sink into the couch. Lord Jesus why have you forsaken me. This couch is stupidly uncomfortable so there is no way I will sleep on it. The floor is not even an option, the bed is the only viable option.

Any other day the bed would be perfect but the problem now is that he, clearly, still has an effect on me add months of self service and missing the real deal which led to a cerebos build up and you get a horny and hormonal woman. I dont know how long we will be here but I already want to go home. The only problem with going home is my father and his silly demands. I guess I'll have to survive the next few days on hope and self discipline. If I can find it.

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Unedited

There is something about being in a peaceful place far away from the hustle and bustle of city life. Being here has helped me put things into perspective and make decisions that are long overdue. The walks have helped clear my mind and being here with my phone on flight mode means there are less voices in my head to distract me.

This morning I woke up and took Hlelo for a walk around the game farm. It's not full so I dont have to run into people all the time. And Hlelo loves it. After our walk we go back to the chalet. When I get there the door is slightly opened, I guess Makhosi is back from his morning jog. I go in and I hear laughter and giggling from the balcony. He is clearly not alone. I

leave Hlelo in her stroller and walk to the balcony. I peek through the curtains and he is with a lady. She's pretty. I clear my throat and they both turn to look at me.

"Hello."

"You're back?"

"Yep. I am going to have breakfast."

"I've already asked them to bring it here." Okay? And here I thought room service doesn't exist around here.

"I thought room service wasn't allowed?" The girl clears her throat and smiles at me. I'm yet to determine how genuine that smile is.

"Well as co owner I do believe Mr Khuzwayo has some privileges." She says and then turns to look at him with the smile still plastered on her face.

"I'm sorry who are you again?" Makhosi clears his throat.

"Uhm, oh yeah, Tivikele, this is Mulalo Raphasha, she

owns the place. Mulalo this is Tivikele." She chuckles and lightly punches him on the arm before turning to me, her hand held out for a handshake.

"Please, he is just being modest. He meant to say co owner." I shake her hand and quickly pull away. "He knows this place wouldnt exist without him." I've finally determined what kind of smile she gives. To me it's almost professional, you know the kind you put on for customers like a mask you put on and off? That smile. And as soon as she turns to him it becomes a flirtatious one with a bit of blushing thrown in.

"Its nice to meet you Mulalo."

"You too. I've heard so much about you. So hows the little Princess?"

"She's good. So how long before breakfast gets here?" She looks at her wristwatch.

"It should be here any moment now. But I will go and check what the hold up is." She turns back to Makhosi and puts her hand on his naked arm. Call

me crazy but I'm pretty sure she is feeling him up. If eyeballs could go any deeper in my head I'm sure by now they would be stuck there because of the eye rolls I keep trying to hide. "Mr Khuzwayo, we will talk. Plus I'd like to show you all the progress we've done over the past few months." He smiles at her and she turns to me again. "Thibikili, let me check on your breakfast." I dont even have the energy to correct her butchering of my name, but I'm pretty sure she did it on purpose.

I step aside and watch her leave while shaking her none existent ass. Well she has an ass that compliments her slim physique with her long ass legs that reach all the way up to heaven. Where was I when God was giving away those legs? Urgh.

"Are you Okay?" He asks. I put on my brightest smile. "Perfect." As if on cue there is a knock on the door. I'm guessing its breakfast. "I'll get it."

"They can set up on the balcony. I'm going to take a

shower."

We head our separate ways. I open the door and sure enough it's someone from the kitchen. I show them where to set up and in less than ten minutes she is done. I pick Hlelo up and go out to the balcony. It's the perfect spot for breakfast honestly. It is overlooking a river that's flowing down below. Across the river is a small hill leading to a veld with some trees around it. And from here you can see the wildlife when it comes to drink at the river. I could live here honestly. Its beautiful.

I stand by the balcony rails showing Hlelo the animals, not that she can see them anyway. I hear the clicking sounds of a camera and I turn around to find Makhosi with a camera taking pictures.

"I thought places like this didnt allow paparazzi?" I take a seat.

"Exceptions are made sometimes." He puts the camera down and takes Hlelo from me. He takes a seat and eats with Hlelo on his arm. He is so good with her. She falls asleep in his arms and he takes her inside. He comes back and sits down.

"Makhosi." He looks up from his phone. "I'm sorry." He furrows his brow and stares at me.

"Why? What happened?"

"Nothing happened. I'm just sorry I lied to you about the abortion." His face relaxes and he goes back to his eating.

"Dont worry about it. It's fine."

"No. It's not. I shouldn't have lied to you."

"Honestly, it's fine. Besides maybe that was my own punishment for what I did to you."

"Please stop saying it's fine because its not. Yes you hurt me but I had no right to lie to you. Yes being away from you helped me deal with things my way but I shouldn't have used an innocent baby for my

own selfish reasons. Hlelo deserves better than for me to use her as a pawn in my own battles. No matter how badly you hurt me I had no right to take away your fatherhood experience just because of my selfish reasons." He sighs and sips his coffee.

"Thank you. That means a lot to me."

"The thing is, besides what happened between me and you, bringing a child in the world wasnt part of my plans at that moment. In my head I had this picture perfect idea of how I wanted to start a family. My business would be international and doing very well, I'd be married and my children would come into the world surrounded by lots and lots of love. So when I found out I was pregnant, it took a lot out of me to reconcile the picture I had in my head with the current reality. But right now I need to make peace with the fact that that little dream I had is dead and buried. All I need to focus on now is Hlelo and giving her the life she deserves. And I cant do that without you. So the custody agreement will be cancelled. I dont think there should be a timetable to parenting.

Although I still dont want Zama anywhere near my child." He laughs.

"Thank you. I will make sure to keep her away from OUR child." I roll my eyes for the tenth time since morning and eat my almost cold breakfast. "Since we are in the spirit of being honest, can I ask you something?"

"Sure."

"Why didn't you have the abortion? I mean you were so adamant about going through with it, so what happened?"

I sigh and swallow the muffin that's in my mouth.

"Well, I needed proof I guess." He frowns and tilts his head resting it on his hand that's perched on the table by his elbow.

"Proof of what?"

"Proof that I didnt imagine our relationship. Proof that inspite of what happened I had some reminder of the good times we shared before everything came

tumbling down. It was the only reminder I had left of you." He stares at me not saying anything for a while before he clears his throat and sits back on the chair.

"For what it's worth, our relationship was real to me. I know it started out bad but the more time I spent with you the more I wanted to be close to you. Being with you will always be one of the greatest things I've ever done in my life, minus everything else, I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world. If I could go back in time though I would do things differently. But I know there is no going back and there isn't much I can do to erase the past."

"Well the past needs to stay where it is and focus on the here and now."

"Right. So, truce?" He holds out his hand for a handshake. I take it and we shake hands.

"Truce." I insist and we laugh.

As hard as this moment was for me it needed to

happen, if not for my heart to heal and let go but for Hlelo. She deserves better and I will do anything and everything in my power to give her the life she deserves. Even if that means putting my own issues and heartbreak aside to focus on her.

After breakfast I decide to pump some milk for her so I can go for a swim and maybe do a detour to the spa. Plus this will be her introduction to the bottle. As long as it's not formula, for now. I finish pumping and take a shower. Makhosi will stay with her while I relax a bit.

I leave them and head to the pool first. Limpopo is hot and the swim provides a much needed cooling. I get in and do a few laps before getting out and laying on the pool lounger. With sunscreen and shades on I lay there and just soak in the sun. My plan was going very well until someone shielded the sun from hitting me. I took my shades off and looked up, Mulalo.

"Can I help you?" She smiles and drags the lounger next to me and sits down. I sit up cause clearly this will not be a passing conversation.

"How does it feel?"

"What?"

"To win. How does it feel?" I dont even know what she is talking about.

"Well, it feels good. I mean there is something about working hard and then being rewarded for it. Of course its important to feel like a winner first. Why do you ask?" She laughs but the laugh doesn't reach her eyes.

"A few years ago Makhosi insisted he didnt want a child, in fact he went as far as ensuring that I got an abortion because he wasn't ready. Of course being the naive and love stuck girl that I was I did everything he asked me. And then a few years down the line you show up and he almost loses his mind because you claimed to have terminated his child. So my question really is what is it about you and

your child that would make him so... so.... I dont know what's the word? So whipped as the young people say." Okay I just learnt things I probably have no business learning.

"Isnt this a conversation you should be having with Makhosi?"

"Well you're the one who seems to have won his heart so I'm curious."

"Well, I can safely tell you I didn't win his heart, Hlelo on the other hand, now that one has him wrapped around her tiny little finger." She chuckles.

"You know you can act like an idiot as much you like but you and I both know the only hold you have over him is that child. A child whose paternity is still questionable at most. So what is it that you want from him exactly? His money? What?" I take my feet down from the lounger and face her, woman to woman cause its quite obvious the girl has more to say.

"I dont know who your sources are but I have a little

suspicion. Now what your source forgot to tell you is that my daughter's paternity is not being questioned, especially not by her father and that's the only person whose opinion matters when it comes to that. Secondly, your source forgot to tell you that I am..... you know what, you're right. I want his money. All of it."

I grab my towel and put on my flops.

"The next time you want to play Sherlock Holmes on my life, make sure you dig for all the truth not what you want to hear. I'm sorry about your baby, but don't ever think that gives you a pass on my life. If you have issues with Makhosi and him being a father now, take it up with him. And make sure you and Zama exchange proper notes next time." I leave her sitting there and go back to the chalet.

I find Makhosi working while miss sleepyhead does what she does best. I don't know if I should ask him about this or not. But I figure it's none of my

business. I'm not his girlfriend so he doesn't owe any explanations.

"You're back. How was your swim?" He says looking up from his laptop.

"It was perfect." He nods and goes back to what he was doing. I take a shower and join Hlelo on the bed. I take my phone and put it off of flight mode and messages and missed calls come flooding in. There are also emails, mainly from work. I check them and all I get are updates on what's happening there and I must say I'm impressed. My team seems to be on top of things. One less thing to worry about.

I return my dads missed call and he picks up on the first ring as if he has been waiting for my call.

"Where the heck are you?" That's the greeting I get after four days of not talking to me. I roll my eyes.

"Sawubona baba, unjani? (how are you)"

"I'm perfectly fine. Where are you?"

"I am in Limpopo."

"Did I send you to Limpopo? Why dont you ever listen? What if something bad happens to you? What if something happens to the baby? How are you going to explain yourself to Makhosi? Why are you so stubborn Tivikele?" Question after question I have no idea where to even begin answering him.

"Too many questions Baba, but all you need to know is that I'm fine and so is Hlelo. And I won't have to explain anything to Makhosi because he is here too. So please dont worry, I'm fine. We are fine." I hear him release a deep breath.

"The two of you are there together and you're both still breathing?" I smile a bit because that is a valid question, to some extent but we are adults so we have to behave as such.

"Yebo baba, we are both still breathing. How is mom?"

"She's fine. Just worried about you."

"Well I am great. Greet her for me, I have to go."

"Okay. Just make sure you dont come back with another baby."

"Hahaha very funny. Goodbye." I hang up and lay down on the bed.

Speaking of baby making, I can officially say I've lost my touch. Almost a year and I haven't had any. I have definitely lost my touch. I need to get my mojo back, and soon.

NARRATED

Meanwhile in Durban, Mr Majola and Mrs Majola are in the lounge of their home when Tivikele's call comes through. After his conversation with his daughter he hangs up the phone and turns to his wife.

"She is fine. She is in Limpopo with Makhosi." Mrs Majola sips her tea trying to hide the smile on her face. She puts the tea cup down and lovingly looks at her husband.

"So your little devious plan worked?" Mr Majola smiles.

"Of course. That girl thinks she's clever but I know her better than she knows herself. Force her to do one thing and she'll do the opposite. All I had to do was push her to the right and she would go to the left. Even if it means colluding with the 'enemy'."

"Do you think they will get back together?" She asks a look of hope framing her face.

"Do you want them to get back together?" She sighs and looks at the blank TV in front of her contemplating the question her husband just posed to her.

A few months ago her answer would have been a

resounding no. She would have given all the reasons in the world for her daughter to never be tied to Makhosi, but now there is a child, a lifetime bond plus Makhosi has done right by her child and even humbled himself and apologized for his mistakes.

"I dont know. All I know is that she was happy with him. It would be easy to dismiss their relationship but it won't change how happy she was. I wish things could have worked out then, but right now, if they can just do right by Hlelo then I'll be happy."

"That's true. Makhosi might not be my favorite human being but I will always respect a man who knows when he is wrong and tries to rectify his mistakes."

He picks up his phone again and makes a call.

"Macingwane."

"Khuzwayo. Nikahle Kodwa (are you well?)"

"Akufani, umphefumulo usehlangene nenyama (we

are still alive.)"

"Good. I wanted to let you know. I just got a call from Tivikele. She is in Limpopo with Makhosi." Khuzwayo laughs.

"So your devious plan worked?"

"I told you. I know my daughter and her stubborn head."

"What if it hadn't worked?" Majola laughs too.

"Well you would be playing with Hlelo right now."

"I guess. So what now? Am I coming to pay lobola soon?"

"Dont get your hope's up. All we can do now is hope they do what's best for the baby. This is our first grandchild and she deserves to enjoy that honour."

"True. Thank you for being understanding about all this."

"I'm also tired of the drama. I just want to enjoy having my grandbaby without the constant fights."

"I know. Thank you Macingwane."

"No problem. Goodbye. We will talk."

"Goodbye." He hangs up and turns to his wife.

"You better hope and pray your daughter doesn't find out you played her." She says.

"All I did was try and make life easier for Hlelo. Whatever those two consenting adults did, it's on them." He takes a sip of his whiskey with mischievous smile plastered on his face.

"Mission accomplished." He whispers to himself.

THE PLAYERS GUIDE

37

Unedited

All good things come to an end. And our end is today. I wish I could stay here forever but life is calling and it needs to be lived. I lay on the bed looking up at the logs that make up the 'ceiling' in this place reflecting on the past few days. Makhosi and I slept in the same bed for the whole duration of this trip and we didn't do anything. Tragic, I know. But Hlelo was always sleeping between us so that helped. Also I needed to heal first before I can even think of sex. Childbirth is no game.

After a while just laying there and doing nothing I decide to take a shower because once Hlelo wakes up she will need all my attention. I get into the bathroom and open the water in the shower allowing

the cold water pit first. While the shower runs I brush my teeth. When I'm done I take my pyjamas off and get into the shower.

As cliche as it may sound being on this trip has helped me put things into perspective, but has helped me let go of some things and brace others, including the stretch mark's on my abdomen. But then again they are proof of the miracle of childbirth so I'll just have to deal. But one thing has been nagging at the back of my mind. Mulalo and her little extra information I didnt ask for the other day. I've been contemplating whether to ask Makhosi about it, but at the same time I feel like I have no right to be digging into his life. I'm not his girlfriend anymore so maybe that restricts me from asking things that have nothing to do with me.

I get off the shower and dry myself. I lotion and put some deodorant on before taking the toiletries into the bedroom to pack. These two are still sleeping

which is good for me. A little extra time for me. I take out some track pants to wear but they are stained. Well most of my clothes are, except for a denim mini skirt that is way too short for a mother to be wearing. But I guess this mother has no choice now. First order of business when I get back home, do the laundry.

I put on some underwear and then put the skirt on. I find a tank top and throw it on. Sneakers and a denim jacket complete the look. Not bad. Except for the protruding nursing bra. I'm not going to a fashion show so this will have to do. When I am done I call reception and use Makhosi's 'privilege as a co owner' and request for breakfast to be sent to us.

As soon as that's set up I get a towel and warm it up with warm water. I undress the sleeping baby and wipe her down before dressing her up again. Lucky for her she has clothes to last a lifetime. I wake Makhosi up and he grumbles and turns the other

side.

"Makhosi wake up, we still have a long drive ahead of us."

"Just five more minutes. I'll be up just now." He mumbles.

"If you're not up in ten seconds I am going to pour ice cold water on you." I hear him snicker a bit. He thinks I'm joking. "I'm not joking Makhosi." He pulls the duvet up over his head. Okay. Let's see how long that will last. I go to the bathroom and open the water in the sink. I peek my head out of the bathroom door and I see him quickly jump out the covers and sit up on the bed. I laugh and head back to the bedroom.

"So you're afraid of cold water?"

"Dont play like that." He replies while rubbing his eyes. "What time is it?"

"A few minutes before seven. Go and take a shower,

breakfast will be here any minute now." He gets up and drags himself to the bathroom. I get our luggage out and pack. By the time I'm done breakfast has still not arrived. It should have been here twenty minutes ago. Makhosi walks out of the bathroom and gets dressed.

"I thought you said breakfast would be here by now?" He says putting on his watch.

"So did I. But it's still not here. Maybe you should call and find out what's happening." He picks up the phone and makes the call. I can only hear his side of the conversation but what I can make out of it is that someone put a stop to the breakfast being brought up here because it's not allowed. Wanna guess who? Bingo! He hangs up the phone and turns to look at me.

"Let me guess, breakfast is not coming?" He sighs and puts on his jacket.

"Nope. Apparently Miss Mulalo says it's not allowed."

I told you.

"What happened to your 'privileges'?" He laughs.

"They seem to have disappeared. And I noticed this past couple of days she's been offish a bit. I wonder what happened?" He seems really worried and I'm not sure if I should tell him or not. But then again it would take him out of his misery.

"Maybe it might have to do with the little conversation we had." His brow furrows and his hands go to his waist.

"What conversation?"

"Well, she wanted to know what I did to you to make you want a child when you didn't want one with her. She said you even forced her to have an abortion because of it."

"She said that?"

"Yep. Did she lie?"

"I can't believe she told you that. And yes she did lie. I never forced her to have an abortion."

"So what happened, cause she seems, hurt, I guess."

"When we were in varsity she was friends with Zama. I was doing my third year when she was doing her first. We started dating. A few months later she found out she was pregnant. Of course I was scared but I figured there's no back to sender when it comes to a child so I'd just have to step up and be a father. She on the other decided she can't go through with the pregnancy. Her father is a well respected pastor and she didn't want to disappoint him so she decided to get an abortion. I begged her not too, I knew if I spoke to my parents they would be willing to help but she would have none of it. So eventually I told her to do whatever she wanted. A few days later her and Zama went to some backstreet place and got the abortion. There were complications and she ended up being told her chances of having kids were less than ten percent. So she and Zama blame me for it because apparently I didn't try hard enough to stop her." Okay now I have a case of he said she said on my hands.

"So you broke up with her because of it?"

"Not really. We dated for two more years after that but the constantly being reminded of the abortion and the complications after became too much. As far as her and Zama are concerned I should have married her because no man would ever want her." A whole lot of mix masala of you ask me. But I need to ask.

"Okay so how did you end up being in business with her if your relationship was that bad?"

"Emotional blackmail I guess. She found out about this place being sold, she needed money to buy it but the loan she got from the bank would not cover everything so I asked for a loan from my dad and gave it to her as an investor."

"I still dont understand why you would want to tie yourself to her after everything, is that not allowing her to control you in some way?"

"Perhaps. But I've never taken much interest in the business. This was my first time even coming here. The only time we would talk was when it came to

business or dividends needed to be paid and that's like three or four times a year so I figured she'd be too busy around here to care what I do with my life."

"Well Zama had made sure she keeps her friend up to date about your life. She asked me about the DNA tests."

"Well she can update her all she wants it won't change anything. And she knows it too."

"Does she?"

"Yes, she does."

I know he says that but I don't think she knows it. From the conversation I had with her it was clear she is holding on to some hope for a future with him, and with Zama ready to whisper anything in Makhosi's ear and him believing it, her little fantasy is really not that far fetched.

"I'll go talk to her to bring breakfast." He says putting on his shoes.

"No, dont worry about it. She might just spit on the food. We will get breakfast on the way."

"Are you sure? Civilization is an hour away and you're breastfeeding. You need to eat."

"I'd rather wait, thank you very much."

"Okay then. Get Hlelo strapped in, I'll bring the bags." He disappears into the bathroom. I put Hlelo in her stroller and push her out. I get her strapped into her car seat and then put the stroller in the boot. Just as I close the boot I find Miss Thang standing next to the car. She has a bad habit of appearing out of nowhere like a witch.

"Leaving us already?" She asks with that smile on her face.

"Of course. We have to go back to our life."

"Your life? You and Makhosi are back together again?"

"Well we did spend a full week locked away in a private chalet in a game farm, do the math." Her

smile disappears as fast as she appeared.

"It must be nice."

"It is. You know what they say, love always wins."

She snorts and crosses her arms.

"Dont count on that. He will come back to where he belongs eventually."

"No he wont." Makhosi interrupts from behind her.

She slowly turns to face him. "Please stop spreading lies about me. You and I both know I never forced you to have an abortion so please dont lie on my name."

"I dont know what....." she begins only to be interrupted by him.

"Dont feign ignorance either, it doesnt suit you."

"I'm sorry."

"I'll be at reception in a minute to check out. Please make sure everything is in order."

"That's fine. Are you not having breakfast before you go?"

"No, we will buy food on the way since you refused to have breakfast brought up here."

"My apologies. I thought...."

"Its fine. Please make sure everything is in order so we can go."

"Of course." She turns and walks to her Golf cart and drives away. I guess now it's no longer a case of she said he said, now its she lied and she got caught. I mean if she was telling the truth from the get go why couldnt she defend herself to him?

"I'll get the rest of the bags then we can go." He walks back to the chalet so I get in the car and put the seat belt on. Hlelo is changed and fed and now she is discovering the world around her. Soon she will be out like a light so hopefully the ride will be a smooth one. Makhosi comes back and puts the rest of the bags in the boot then gets in. We take the 30 second drive to reception and we check out.

"You're good?"

"Yep."

"Okay then. Let's go." He starts the car and off we go. An hour later we get to a mall. We buy breakfast from Mugg and Bean and continue on our way. The trip back is shorter than before. Just before we get to Joburg Makhosi receives a call. And since his phone is connected to the bluetooth speaker he answers without taking it off the speaker.

"Baba."

"Makhosi. Where are you?"

"On my way to Joburg. What's wrong?"

"Nothing, uno MakaHlelo? (Are you with Hlelo's mother?)" I turn to look at him and find him looking at me too. Why would his father be interested in where I am?

"Yes. Why?"

"Perfect. Drive straight home. The imbeleko ceremony is happening tomorrow."

"How? We dont have anything planned." He answers with a frown on his face.

"You dont, but we do. Everything has been set up, all you have to do is come home and we will have the ceremony tomorrow."

"What if we were not coming back?"

"Well you are coming back so that's all that matters. Come home." He hangs up and the phone goes back to playing music.

"How did he know we are coming back?" I ask him. I'm still confused really.

"I dont know. Who did you tell?"

"Just my mum and my friends. And I'm pretty sure your father doesnt know my friends."

"But he knows your mum."

"And you think she told him?" We stare at each other for a second. No. They are not friends. They are not that close why would she tell him?

"Nah!" We both say in unison. There is no way.

"Maybe they had it planned all along they were just waiting for us to come back." I nod my head in agreement. Let's just put it down to coincidence.

An hour and a half later we pull up to his home. The moment the car comes to a stop everyone is already out of the house and opening the back seat to take Hlelo. I open the door to get out and then I remember I'm wearing a mini skirt. I slowly close the door again.

"What's wrong?" Makhosi asks.

"I'm wearing a mini skirt." He laughs and looks at my thighs for the hundredth time.

"So what's wrong with a mini skirt." I turn on the seat to face him.

"This is your home. I might not be a Makoti but I respect my elders. I can't be prancing around in a mini skirt."

"Of course you can. It's not that big a deal. As long as my parents are fine with it then it doesn't matter."

"Well did you parents say they are fine with it? No? Exactly. Get me a kanga or anything to wrap around me." He sighs and mumbles an 'ok' then gets out of the car. He goes to the main house where everybody disappeared to with Hlelo the VIP.

A few minutes later his mum steps out of the house and comes to the car. I roll down the window while covering myself with one of Hlelo's blankets.

"Makoti, why are you not coming in?" She asks concern all over her face. "Is something wrong?"

"Nothing is wrong ma, I'm just waiting for Makhosi to bring me something to wrap myself with. I dont think its appropriate for me to be walking around in a mini skirt." Her face relaxes and she chuckles.

"Dont worry about it. Let's go." She opens the door and holds her hand out for me. I take it and get out.

She leads me into the main house. We get to the lounge and Hlelo is already on her grandfather's lap with everyone gushing over her. Everyone of course except the devils twin sister. She throws daggers at me as soon as she sees me.

I greet and take a seat. Makhosi comes from somewhere in this house and hands me a throw. I throw it over my legs and watch as Hlelo is moved from one person to the next. She's asleep but they won't put her down. Eventually she makes it to me and I get up to go put her down. We are given the same house we were in last time. I put her down in the cot and when i turn around Zama is leaning on the door, arms crossed and one leg crossed over the other staring at me.

"So how long did you think you'd keep my brother away from his child?" I cross my arms and sit on the bed.

"I dont know. How long do you think I should have

kept him away?" She snorts and walks into the bedroom.

"You know everyone might think you are this sweet little angel but I can see right through the little act you put up." I smile.

"We must have superpowers then cause I can see through your own little guilt ridden act. I know it's not that you dont like me cause let's be honest, you dont know me so how can you hate me? However the little guilt inside you forced you to be this mean and ugly person." She frowns and puts her hands on her waist.

"What are you talking about?"

"I met your little friend Mulalo. Now I know what your issue is." She swallows and crosses and uncrosses her arms. "Yeah, I know about your little detour to that abortion clinic where you took your friend."

"She told you that?"

"No, Makhosi did. Unlike you I didn't have to go

digging for info on you."

"Well then I'm sure he also told you about how much he loves her?" I chuckle and stand up.

"You mean Loved. L.O.V.E.D. Loved. Get it right."

"Keep fooling yourself. Makhosi will end up with Mulalo. He loves her."

"No he doesn't. Your little trick to emotionally blackmail him into being with you friend didn't work then and it sure as hell isn't working now. You know if you were that good of a friend to Mulalo you would let go of that guilt inside you. If you were a good friend to her you would tell her to move on with her life because I'm sure somewhere out there, there is a man ready to love her the way she deserves instead of her holding out for someone who clearly doesn't want her."

"And you think he wants you."

"I don't think, I know." She chuckles and holds her waist again.

"Let me be a 'good friend' to you then. I'll tell you this for free, you and Makhosi might share a child but that's where it all ends. He will never love you like he loved her." I shrug my shoulders and get close to her.

"Perhaps. But what you need to know, stay in your lane, you don't need to like me and you can stay in your little fantasy world but stay away from me and stay away from my child. You do you boo, and allow me to do me." I walked to the door. "Now if you will excuse me, I need to take a nap, it was a long drive from our little vacation as a family."

She clicks her tongue and walks out. Peace might not be upon us yet but I need to make sure i keep watch over Hlelo. I still don't trust that girl.

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Unedited

Its finally over and done with. After weeks of drama and going back and forth Hlelo is officially and Khuzwayo not just at home affairs alone but even her ancestors know her now. It was quite a beautiful ceremony and everyone seemed to enjoy it. And yes now I know my parents, more especially mum, told the Khuzwayo's about our return. This little bff friendship that's growing between them is unsettling to say the least. But I guess it's good for Hlelo, having both sides of her family getting along will serve her well in the long run.

Today we are going back home. We had to stay an extra two days here after the ceremony, I dont know why but it has to be done. MamKhuzwayo took Hlelo

so I can bath and pack. She's a godsend that one. I can only pray she will keep her away from Zama and her nasty attitude.

I finish taking a bath and get dressed. I start packing. I have my back to the door so I cant see anyone behind me but I can sense a pair of eyes on me. I turn amd find Zama standing by the door with her arms and legs crossed leaning on the door frame. I figure for my own peace of mind, I'll just ignore her.

"You think you're smart neh, you think you've won?" I didnt even know I was in a competition let alone that I'd won something. I ignore her. U have more important things to worry about. I hear her footsteps coming behind me until she is standing in front of me.

"Eventually my brother is going to see you for who and what you are." I stop packing and look at her.

"Usucala ukuba nescefe manje Zama, umdala kabi for lenonsense oyenzayo. (You're starting to annoy me. You're too old for this nonsense." She chuckles and claps her hands.

"I was wondering when the real you would come out. I'm just wondering how long it will be before the real hoe in you comes out to play."

"Can I ask you something, just something random, why are you so obsessed with where your brother sticks his dick in? Is it because you want him to stick it in you?" She opens her mouth in shock.

"You bitch." She says and throws a punch my way. I duck and she misses. Thank God for my self defence classes. I pop up and land a punch on her jaw and she stumbles back in shock.

"You didn't think I could throw a punch did you?" She charges at me and I take a couple of steps back. She throws another punch and I duck again. I'm not sure if it's the self defence classes being good or I'm the one with a natural talent to fight as I keep ducking and diving. She throws one more punch and I dive, unfortunately this time she gets a hold of my braids and pulls, hard. I hold on to her arms trying to free myself but it's a futile process. I let go of her arms and hold tightly to her sweater right on her waist. I lean down and push her back till she hits the wardrobe. The handle digs into her back and she screams letting go of my braids. I rise up and land a punch on her face again and she falls down.

I stand there with my fists bundled up and my arms raised like a true boxer.

"It's not a fair fight if you're on the floor. Get up bitch." She gets on her knees and feet and I'm tempted to land a strong kick on her stomach, but

she could be pregnant and I dont want to be responsible for her losing her baby, if there is one. But then again this is Zama we are talking about, if she was getting some dick in her life she wouldnt be so obsessed with Makhosi's love life.

She holds on to the wardrobe handle and stands up. She cant seem to stand properly, I guess the handle did do a number on her back. I dance around like Muhammed Ali ready to sting like a bee.

"Come on. Let's end this." I say. She looks at me with pain all over her face mixed with embarrassment. I almost feel bad for punching her. But it was self defence, no judge would ever convict me for this. I stop moving around and put my hands on my waist. "This is stupid." She chuckles and rubs her back.

"Wait until my brother hears about you attacking me." She whispers. As if the devil is on duty today, the door opens and Makhosi calls out my name.

Zama and I look at each other when we hear his voice then she starts screaming. I'm sure even the people at the farm probably heard her.

Makhosi comes running and stops at the door. He looks at me then looks at his oscar award winning actor sister who is now on the floor again writhing in 'pain'. He quickly rushes to her and helps her up.

"What happened? Why are you on the floor?" She cries harder at the questions and all I can do is watch this scene unfold. Makhosi turns to me. "What happened Tivikele?" He asks. Shem, as crazy as his sister is, he is genuinely concerned about her. I open my mouth to answer but the crazy girl beats me to it.

"She attacked me." I chuckle and cross my arms on my chest. Makhosi looks at me confusion stuck on his face.

"Ah ah, dont look at me like that. You know your

sister needs a whole psych ward. How would I 'attack' her when she is in my space." I guess things register in his head and he looks back at his sister.

"Zama, what did you do?" Her ass stops crying, it's like someone just switched off the radio. She even stands up and looks at her brother with her arms on her waist. Did someone say cut to her little scene?

"Really Makhosi? I'm your sister and you're going to believe this whore over me?"

"Okay, I think you should leave." Makhosi says sending shock all over her sorry ass. She stomps her way out of there like a little baby throwing a tantrum.

"How old is she again?" No I seriously need to know cause this girl is acting like a toddler.

"Really? A fight in my house?" Makhosi says staring at me.

"Hhehhake mnumzane. The person you should be asking that just stomped out of here like a toddler so

don't ask me that." I turn back to my bags and continue packing. I hear him sigh behind me before he walks out. I hear the door banging before he shouts Zama's name all over the yard. His voice fades away so I assume he is in the main house. I should really get out of here before things get worse.

I take out my phone and text Makhosi asking him to bring Hlelo with him. I finish packing and take all the bags to the lounge. I hear faint talking from outside. I stand by the window and listen. Lucky for me I don't have to snoop long cause the voices get louder and closer. Its Makhosi and Zama. I think I can even hear their mum somewhere in the mix.

"I can't believe you Makhosi, you're going to believe the same girl that lied to you for months on end, watching you suffer mourning a child over me, your own sister. Is her pussy that good?"

"ZAMA!" MamKhuzwayo shouts and even I am afraid of her. "Sengkhathelo yilomsangano wakho. (I'm

tired of your nonsense.) Kanti yini ngawe? Usugula ngekhanda? (What is wrong with you? Are you crazy?)"

"Ma!"

"Just shut up. For once in your life cant you let peace reign in this home? Why are you so invested in Makhosi's love life? Why?"

"I'm just trying to protect him." Zama hits back.

"Protect me from what ZamaQwabe? Protect me from what?"

"From her!" I hear Makhosi chuckle.

"You know what, I'm done with you. Mum, I'm sorry but I will not be bringing my child around with her here. Her hatred for Hlelo's mother is clearly more than I had imagined. And I don't know when that hatred will spill over onto my child." I hear footsteps coming towards the house. I quickly rush to the bedroom pretending like I wasn't just eavesdropping.

Makhosi walks in with Hlelo in his arms.

"Are you ready to go?" He asks while strapping Hlelo into her car seat.

"Yeah."

"Good. Let's go." He picks the car seat up and walks out. So much drama. Not that it's not warranted but still, drama eitherway. I pick up my phone and bag and follow him out. I take one bag to the car and put it in the boot. He puts Hlelo in the car and then goes back to get the rest of the bags. His mum and the other sane siblings come out of the main house to say their goodbyes. His mom stands in front of me and takes my hands in hers.

"I know that we've had our fair share of drama the past few weeks but I want you to know that you are welcome here anytime. And I apologize for Zama's behavior."

"It's okay ma. There's no need to apologize."

"Of course there is. Her behavior is not a reflection of how we treat guests in this home." Well I could have told you that. "Please take care of my

grandbaby." I smile and give her a hug.

"I will. I promise."

"Tivikele let's go." Makhosi calls out from inside the car. I say my goodbyes and get in the car.

"A little patience never killed anyone." I say trying to lighten the mood but it doesn't seem to work.

He starts the car and drives off. Silent treatment it is then.

We get to my place and I want to ask how he is going to get back home since he is driving my car and I know it's not going back with him. I take Hlelo up while he gets the bags. My phone rings just as I open the door to my apartment.

"Hello."

"Miss Majola, Alex Joshua here."

"Oh, hi Alex, how are you?"

"I'm good. Congratulations on the baby."

"Thank you. So what can I do for you?" I out Hlelo down on the rug and I take a seat on the couch.

"Well, I know you're on maternity leave, but I have a friend of mine from London who needs your services."

"Really?"

"Yes. My dad can't stop raving about your work and his friends are just as impressed so my friend also needs a bit of that T.N.M Technologies touch." I chuckle.

"Well I'm flattered. I will ask the acting CEO to contact him and see what we can do for him." He laughs.

"Yeah that would be nice except he is looking to work with you directly."

"I am on maternity leave Alex you know that."

"I understand that and he knows it too which is why he has agreed to work with you on your schedule and he will fly down or take zoom meetings whenever necessary." God, I know I dont ask you for

much but please, from the bottom of my heart I beg you, just once give men the ability to carry a child and then push it out via their tiny ass penis holes and let's see how long it would take them to get back to work. Idiots. But this is business and if I am going to leave a lasting legacy for my baby then I have to suck it up, grin and bear it.

"Let me think about it Alex. I'll get back to you within the next week."

"Perfect. This is a great opportunity Tee, dont let it pass you by." And then the emotional blackmail just to seal the deal. Men!

"I will call you before the week ends. Goodbye." I hang up and take a deep breath.

"Who was that?" I hear Makhosi behind me.

"Business."

"Are you not supposed to be on maternity leave?"

"I am. But some things do need my attention."

"Mhmm." He takes the bags to the bedroom. I look

at Hlelo who is busy playing with her hands.

"I have to do this dont I?" She looks at me when she hears my voice and then does those baby sounds as if she will give me a solid answer. "Its all for you though, so you need to remind me of it. Okay? Good." I leave her to play and head to the kitchen. I look through the fridge and its empty. I haven't been here in two weeks so what was i expecting. I need to go grocery shopping.

"Makhosi!" I call out but I get no response. I call him again and nothing. I head to the bedroom and he is laying across my bed snoring. I want to wake him up but he looks so peaceful so I decide to let him be. I guess he will be sleeping over. I take my phone and use the checkers app to order just a few basics for tonight. Once I get the confirmation for the groceries I text the acting CEO and tell her about Alex's call. Then I text Alex and tell him I'm in. All I have to do is remind myself it's all business and now it's more

than just being some badass boss, now it's for my
babygirl. It's all for her.

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Unedited

I can officially bow down and say single working mothers are superheros. I dont know how they do it. Especially those who work from home. I have been doing this juggling business for two weeks now and I'm ready to quit. People will tell you to get some sleep when the baby is sleeping and honestly I would agree with that, in theory, in reality, when the baby sleeps only then do I have free time to do some work, so ultimately that is some not so great advice. And Hlelo has been showing me flames since I started working. It's like she can sense when I'm about to work and that's when she wakes up and cries like she is in competition with someone.

I've been trying to get her down for the last hour but

its proving to be an impossible task. I have a zoom meeting with Duncan James, the London guy Alex referred to me. So far we've only communicated via emails and today is the first time I will be seeing his face. Well actually I did google him so maybe it wont be the first time but still.

"So vele you wont even give me just thirty minutes nje so I can finish this meeting?" I ask the jolly baby. She stares at me and smiles. Oh God, that beautiful toothless smile gets me everytime. Shem I made a perfect baby. And I can proudly say she is a mini me cause she looks the most like me. I won the genetics jackpot when it comes to her. "I just need you to relax for thirty minutes baby, just thirty minutes and I'll get you a barbie doll." She laughs. "No? Too young for bribes?" Its like everytime I open my mouth and say something she finds a joke.

The minutes are sprinting down and my meeting will be starting soon. My phone rings and mums name

flashes on the screen.

"Mummy!"

"Hey, hows my baby girl?" She asks excitedly.

"I'm frustrated. I have a meeting in less than fifteen minutes and Hlelo refuses to sleep."

"I was actually asking how Hlelo is doing." She answers with so much conviction. Not even a ping of guilt. I take the phone off my ear and look at it as if I can see her face. I shake my head and put it back in my ear.

"You do know I am your child right? I was your child before Hlelo came. You do remember me right?" She burst out laughing making me look like a jealous girlfriend.

"Jealousy doesnt suit you baby. How is Hlelo?" Mxm. I have officially been replaced.

"She's fine, stubborn as hell too." She chuckles.

"I wonder who she takes after. So what's this meeting you're talking about? I thought you were on

maternity leave."

"I am, but I've been working from home. I have a new client who refuses to work with anyone but me."

"Let me guess, it's a man?"

"Obviously."

"Well I'm sorry baby, if I was there I would help you but I'm here. Dont you think it's time to get a nanny. If you're going to be working from home you need a nanny to help you out."

"I dont know. I'll think about it. Anyways let me try to get her to sleep. I'll call you later."

"Okay. I love you. And kiss my baby for me."

"I will and I love you too." I hang up and turn back to Hlelo and she is fast asleep. I almost screamed for joy but I had to hold it in.

I push the stroller to the bedroom. I'm tempted to pick her up and put her in her crib but I'm scared she might just wake up. So I adjust the stroller to make her sleep in there instead. Once I'm sure she is

comfortable I tiptoe to the closet and get a simple white shirt and put it on. I dont need a skirt or pants so my sweatpants will do just fine. I put my braids up in a ponytail, lipstick on, eyebrows in place and a bit of mascara and I'm ready for my first official meeting after baby. I spray some perfume on, I know it's pointless for a zoom meeting but it's a confidence booster for me so I need it.

I head back to the lounge and quickly set up my laptop on the dining table. I have two minutes before the meeting starts so I say a little prayer. As soon as I say Amen the door bursts open. I look up and Makhosi walks in. I should not have given him an extra key.

"You do know doors were made to be knocked on right!" He dangles the key in front of me.

"Where's my baby?"

"Shes in the bedroom and you need to join her cause I have a meeting right now. Goodbye."

"I guess I'll just have to wake her up then." He says while strolling to the bedroom. Knowing him, he just might.

As soon as he is out of sight I'm ready for my meeting. Duncan's face fills the screen. I smile. He looks better in person, well he looks better than the photos I saw him in. Maybe he will look even more handsome when we meet.

"Mr James. How are you?"

"I'm very well thank you." He answers in his deep British accent. "So let's get down to business. What do you have for me?"

I explain everything we have come up with in the past two weeks, strategies and all that. But he seems bored. In fact he keeps looking at me like he is deep in thought. Maybe I'm reading too much into this but I can't help feeling like he is somehow trying his best to see beyond, beyond me. I don't know why I get this creepy feeling from him. One thing I've

learnt being in business, always trust your gut, and right now my gut is telling me I've just wasted two weeks of my life that I'll never get back.

"Impressive Miss Majola. Tell you what, I'll be in South Africa in the next couple of days, how about we set up a meeting for then so we can iron out the details of the contract?" I force a smile on my face.

"Of course. I'll wait for your call with the time and place."

"Perfect. My PA will be in touch."

"Thank you. Have a good day."

"You too." I close the laptop and breathe out. I sit there for a while trying to digest everything.

On the outside this contract would be a great way to get more international clients, and the money is good too but something about this man unsettles me. I dont know what it is and I cant put my finger on it but something is off about him.

"Are you Okay?" Makhosi asks coming into the lounge with Hlelo in his arms. He really did wake her up.

"I don't know. Maybe I'm reading too much into this meeting but something is just unsettling."

"How so? You don't think the meeting was legit?"

"No. It's definitely legit. The man I had a meeting with is a big shot in some British company so I know the meeting was real, it's just something about him personally."

"All I'm going to tell you is listen to your gut. If it doesn't feel right, let it go. Something else will come along. You're a great businesswoman, you'll be just fine without him."

Maybe Makhosi is right, this might just not be worth it. I open my laptop ready to type an email telling this man not to bother setting up the meeting but it seems I'm too late. I find an email in my inbox from

Khwezi who is the acting CEO telling me she just got confirmation from Duncan's PA about the meeting. And I find another email from Duncan's PA telling me the same thing. I close the laptop again without typing the email to Duncan. Maybe if I meet with him face to face I can confirm what I'm feeling. Yeah, let me just wait and confirm everything face to face.

"Have you cancelled the meeting?" Makhosi asks. I look up and he is staring at me. Hlelo is also staring at me. I smile cause she looks like me. Exactly like me. My baby did me proud. "Why are you smiling like a crazy person?"

"She looks like me." He frowns like I just said something crazy. He looks at her then looks at me.

"No she doesn't. She looks like me. Daughters always look like their dads."

"Not this one." I get up and give her a kiss and prance to the bedroom to change.

"Your mother is weirdly crazy." I hear him tell Hlelo.

By the time I get back to the lounge I find a note saying he has taken Hlelo for a walk. But the stroller is still in the bedroom. I wonder where they are walking to. I figure I have this free time I might as well start on dinner. Lucky for me I took out the meat from the freezer early in the morning so its defrosted. I make fried rice with a salad and baked chicken. Simple and straight forward.

Just as I close the oven after putting in the chicken I hear voices outside my door. I can tell Makhosi's voice but the other giggling voice is not familiar. I peak through the window and see some girl wearing shorts and an oversized tshirt with flops laughing at God alone knows what that Makhosi said. He's not even that funny but the way this girl is laughing you'd think he was Trevor Noah in the flesh. I cant hear their conversation cause they are speaking softly but girl burst out laughing loud enough for everyone to hear. Mxm. I leave the window and head to the door.

I open the door and they both turn around to look at me. I plaster a smile on my face.

"Hi." I say to the girl and she smiles and says hi back. I turn to Trevor Noah wannabe. "Can I have the baby? It's time for her bath." He looks at me and smiles. Idiot.

"Its okay. I'll bath her." He answers. I know what he is trying to do and it wont work.

"You sure? You seem busy." His smile widens.

"I'm sure. We'll be in in a second."

"Okay." I go back in and close the door. I stand there and listen to them.

"I didnt know you were married." The girl says. The idiot chuckles.

"Oh no. She's just my baby mama." Baby mama? Me? What the fuck is a baby mama even. You know what, I'm pretty sure he knows I'm listening that's why he is doing this. He thinks he is clever. Well I'm clever

too. I go back to my pots. He walks in and I'm tempted to pour some cold water on him since he thinks he is hot, just to cool him down a bit. But I'm a lady, most of the time. And ladies dont do that. So imma keep it cute and classy. Plus he has Hlelo in his arms and my baby will not pay for sins she knows nothing about.

"I thought her bathtime was at seven o'clock?" He asks when he gets in the house. He puts Hlelo down on her rocker.

"It is. I just wanted go give you time with your friend." I answer trying not to even look at him cause I can see he thinks I'm jealous.

"Shes not my friend." I roll my eyes and I guess he sees me cause he laughs. "You're so cute when you're jealous." A scowl forms on my face and I turn to look at him.

"Jealous? Of what exactly?"

"Her!" I laugh and walk closer to him.

"You still havent answered my question. Jealous of what exactly?"

"Jealous that I might just be getting a stepmother for Hlelo. Plus she likes her so thats already a win."

"And what makes you think she doesnt have a stepfather already?" His face changes from smug to..., I don't know, worried maybe.

"And who is her step daddy?"

"Nothing for you to worry about." I turn and go back to the kitchen and finish what I started. Men are easy to play with. He was smug when he was talking about stepmothers but now he is moody cause I mentioned a stepfather.

The meeting with Duncan is in less than an hour. I decided to go past the office to get some documents that Khwezi and the team have prepared. As soon as I get through the huge sliding doors

Pinky is on me with hugs.

"I know you're not back yet but I'm so happy to see you. Hows my baby?" I've clearly lost importance in people's lives. Even my friends call me to check on Hlelo now not me.

"I'm right here and you haven't asked me how I'm doing."

"I can see you're fine so how is she?" Mxm. I give up.

"She is fine. You were with her just last night."

"I know. But it seems like a long time ago."

"Well you can come see her, you know that. Anyways is Khwezi in the office?"

"Yes. Shes waiting for you."

"Cool. Let me go see her. I need to go back home. I left Hlelo with her aunt."

"Please not the toe of satan." Pinky says with a scowl on her face.

"Oh heck no. I'd walk barefoot on hot coals before I let that one get anywhere near my child. Shes with

Philasande." She clutches her chest and lets out a deep breath.

"Thank God."

"Let me see Khwezi. I'll see you later."

I leave her and head to Khwezi's office which is technically my office. I knock and wait for her to invite me in. I never thought I'd see the day I would knock in my own office. I hear a faint come in and I open the door. I walk in and my office has changed. My portrait is no longer on the wall and the desk is now against the wall not in front of the huge window. I know she had to make it her own to feel comfortable but I hope she didn't make any permanent changes.

"Hey, you're early." She says standing up to give me a hug.

"I know. I just want to get this over and done with." She smiles and sits down. I sit on the guest chair.

"Missing the little one already." I smile and try to forget the office and focus on the meeting. "I know the feeling. After I had my son even going to the mall was a struggle. I just couldnt bring myself to leave him with anyone else, not even my own mother. How is she anyway?"

"Growing up too fast. Why cant babies stay little forever." She laughs.

"Maybe one day we will discover an elixir to make that happen." She reaches down next to her and picks up a large pink gift bag with a unicorn on it and hands it to me. "This is from the team. We figured since we couldnt host a baby shower we might as well get you something."

"That's sweet, but you didnt have to." I take the bag and put it on the chair next to me.

"Of course we did." I open it and it's a bebedeparis classic deluxe baby hamper in a box. I open the box and take out some of the stuff and it's so cute. The bibs and pyjamas are even embroidered with her name. So adorable.

"This is beautiful. Thank you so much. I think I'll come back soon to thank the team properly."

"I'm sure they would love that." She opens the desk drawer and takes out two files and hands them to me. "The entire presentation is on there. Its everything we spoke about and we added some minor things but all in all it should get us the contract." She seems excited about this and a week ago i was also excited but now I'm nervous. Not excited nervous just cautious.

"I hope so. Let me get going, I dont want to find traffic on the road." I stand up and take the files and the gift. She stands up too and we shake hands.

"Of course. Good luck." I head out. I say my goodbyes to Pinky then drive to the restaurant.

I get to the restaurant before he does. I tell the hostess that I'm there for a meeting with a Mr James. She smiles.

"Of course we've been expecting you. This way please." She leads me to a secluded part of the restaurant. There is a table set up for two people. I guess his PA is not coming to the meeting. I order a glass of water before the lady walks away. I take my phone out of my purse and scroll through looking for nothing in particular. I look up and see him at the entrance. Some voice at the back of my mind tells me to switch on voice Recorder on my phone. I do it and then place my phone face down on the table. He walks in and I stand up to greet him.

"Miss Majola. Its nice to finally meet you." He says looking at me from head to toe.

"Its nice to meet you too." I extend my hand for a handshake and instead of taking it he comes closer to me with his arms wide open.

"I'm more of a hugger." He says and pulls me in for a hug. His one arm goes over my shoulder and the other holds my waist pulling me close to him and I can even feel his bulge. I wiggle my way out of his

embrace and he smiles, a creepy smile. I sit down and he does the same.

"So, can we get down to business?" I ask taking out the presentation files from my bag.

"Tell you what, let's order some drinks first." He lifts his hand up and a waiter makes his way to us.

"That would be nice but I can't drink."

"That's okay, I'll drink enough for the both of us." He makes his order and the waiter goes away. I hand him the one file and instead of even looking at it he puts it on the table and rests his elbows on it. The waiter brings his drink and then leaves. Duncan stands up and takes his chair and puts it next to me. He sits down, crosses his leg and looks at me sipping his drink.

"So tell me about you Miss Majola." Okay I didn't realise this was an interview.

"There is nothing to tell really."

"Oh come now, I'm pretty sure you can tell me something."

"What do you want to know?" He uncrosses his legs, places the glass on the table and pulls the chair way too close to me. He puts his hand on my thigh brushing it. Thank God I wore pants and not a skirt.

"Tell me how far you are willing to go to get this contract?" He asks his hand moving up and down on my thigh. I hold his hand and place it on the table.

"Mr James. Please refrain from touching me." I tell him looking at him straight in the eye. He smiles and looks at my chest area. He is staring at my milk filled boobs.

He takes his hand and tries to open my shirt but I hit his hand and he laughs.

"Come now Miss Majola. We both know you want this contract and I want to give it to you, but you'll have to give me something too." He says his hand back on my thigh. He is sitting with his legs wide open and I can tell he is horny as fuck right now and

his bulging penis, filling up his pants is enough to tell me that I need to get out of here.

"I think I should go." I stand up and he pulls me back down, he is getting angry.

"Miss Majola, there are plenty of people who would kill for an opportunity like this, dont throw it away. Besides, working with me, I might just sing your praises to the right people, and if you dont, I might just tell my colleagues and associates how you're not willing to go the extra mile for your clients. Think about it." He hisses holding on to my hand tighter than he should.

I take the steak knife that's sitting on the table and stick it on the chair between his legs, close enough to his nutsack to show him I'm serious. He quickly lets go of my arm and sits back on the chair looking at me then back to the knife.

"You're making a mistake Miss Majola." He says between breaths.

"In business and in life I've made plenty of mistakes

and I've learnt from every one of them. Now, listen and make sure you listen carefully. I dont know who told you what about me but this is not how I run my business. I've never had to trade sexual favours for a contract and I'm not about to start now."

"Oh come on. You expect me to believe that you've signed more than five contracts with some of the best companies in Africa and you didnt grease somebody's, well I would say palm but let's replace palm with penis. I'm pretty sure somewhere somehow, some of those contracts were signed between the sheets." I move the knife from the chair and place it straight on his dick.

"I dont know which universe you come from, but in my universe, I dont sleep with man for work. My work speaks for itself and people who choose to work with me do so with full faith in my abilities." I stand up and take both files from the table and put them in my bag.

"You just buried your chance to work with anyone in

Britain or Europe itself." He says fixing himself up. I take my phone from the table and stop the recording. I play it back for him and his mouth opens in shock. He stands up and tries to reach for my phone but I pull away quickly.

"By the time you get to London the board of directors of your company will have this recording in their inbox." I put the phone in my bag. "And if they choose not to do anything about your perverted ways of doing business then maybe the world will. In these days of social media its easy for perverts to go viral."

"Use that thing and I'll destroy you. I promise you."

"Your biggest problem lies in you thinking I am afraid of you. I've dealt with men like you and i always win. Always. You know why? Because inspite of how twisted the world maybe my truth will always be real. I would say it was nice meeting you Mr James but I would be lying. Have a nice life." I turn to walk away and he grabs my bag. I hold on tightly to it so we wrestle for the bag. He pulls the bag towards him and I go with it. He fights me for it , I'm pretty sure if

we were close to people all eyes would be on us.

"Let go." He hisses, my bag still in his grip. I free my one hand from the bag and proceed to grab his balls in my hand and twist. He screams and lets go of the bag. I twist his balls harder and a waiter rushes to us.

"What the heck?" The waiter asks looking at us. I ignore him and focus on this man writhing in pain.

"I hate bullies Mr James. I might be a woman but that doesn't mean I'm helpless. My parents didn't name me Tivikele (protect yourself) for nothing." I let go of his balls and he rolls on the floor holding on to his nutsack. I fix myself up and turn to the waiter.

"When he pays the bill, make sure you give yourself a fat ass tip. You deserve it." I tap his shoulder and walk out.

I get into my car and breathe out. My hands are shaking and I can feel myself getting hot flushes. What the fuck just happened?

THE PLAYERS GUIDE

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Unedited

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Being a woman in corporate, business, retail or whatever spaces women work in, actually being a woman in general in today's society is both a blessing and a curse. The blessing part lies in our diversity, being life givers and nurturers, the curse lies in men thinking they somehow are entitled to our bodies. In this day and age a woman somewhere is being asked to trade sexual favors for jobs. I guess that's why I tend to employ more women than men in my company, but that still doesn't change mens entitlement.

I've had plenty of men hit on me, and most of them have respected my no. And then there is Duncan, not

only was he aggressive but he seemed determined to get what he wanted no matter what. I still cant wrap my head around what happened. I've been sitting in my car in my parking space for the past thirty minutes now just trying to calm myself down and release the tension I'm feeling. I dont want to take all that energy up to my baby.

After an hour I decide to go up. There is no point sitting here cause it wont change what happened. I get my bags and get out of the car. I lock it and head up to the lift. As the lift goes up to my floor I take deep breaths. When it pings alerting me that my ride is over I get out and head to my apartment. I take one more deep breath before I plaster a smile on my face and walk into the house. I find Phila and Hlelo sleeping peacefully on the couch. I tiptoe to the bedroom and throw myself on the bed.

I take my laptop from my bag and power it on. I get off the bed and take off the clothes I'm wearing. I

throw them in the bin and put on some lounge wear. I should have been in these since morning instead of being in the presence of that pervert. I get back on the bed and take my phone and USB cable from my bag. I plug the phone on to the laptop and transfer the recording onto it. Once its uploaded I take the phone off and open my emails. My phone rings just as I'm about to start typing the first email. Alex's name flashes on the screen and the anger I was feeling earlier comes back in full force.

"Alex."

"Hey. I'm calling to find out how the meeting went. Did you get the contract?"

"No."

"What? Why? I thought the meeting was just a formality and the contract was yours?" His voice sounds so sincere you'd think all the words coming out of his mouth are real. All that's left now is for me to see his face.

"It would have been mine. If I'd slept with him."

Silence.

"I'm sorry what?"

"You heard me. Your dear friend told me he would give me the contract and all I had to do was show him how much I wanted while he was busy fondling my thighs."

"That son of a bitch." He mutters. If i didnt know any better I would believe his little act. "I'm so sorry Tee, if I'd known he would do that I would have never referred him to you."

"Are you sure you're not the one who told him to pull that stunt?"

"Of course not. Tee I have way too much respect for you to do something like this. I swear on my daughters life I had no idea he would do that."

"It's fine. He is going to pay for this anyway. I'm going to report him to the board of his company."

"That's not going to work. They worship the ground he walks on and it will be just your word against his."

"I have a recording of the whole thing."

"Perfect. Dont send it to the board though. I'll forward you the email address of the president of the company, he takes things like this pretty seriously. Send the recording to him and Duncan will be out of a job by sunrise."

"I'm confused. Why are you helping me? Isn't he supposed to be your friend?"

"Friend or not I don't condone his behaviour and like everyone he needs to pay. Email that recording to the president of the company and no one will hire him ever again." He hangs up before I can say anything else. And just as he promised he sends me a text with the email address.

I immediately type the email, upload the recording and press send. As soon as I see the sent notification I close the laptop and lay on the bed facing the ceiling. If anyone would have told me this is how my day would be I would not have believed them. The bedroom door opens and Makhosi walks in, Hlelo in one hand and ice cream on the other one.

How did he even open the door?

"Hey, how did the meeting go?" He asks sitting down on the bed. He puts Hlelo next to me.

"Not good. I didnt get the contract."

"Oh I'm sorry. Dont worry about it. You'll get other contracts."

"He wanted me to sleep with him first." I blurt out. He stops eating his ice cream and looks at me, anger boiling in his eyes.

"What?" I shrug my shoulders and play with Hlelo. I see him in the corner of my eyeclenching his jaw.

"Who is this guy anyway?"

"Some British guy. Duncan James. It doesnt matter, I've already reported him to his bosses. They will take care of it."

"And what if they dont?"

"Then the whole world will know him for who and what he is. I recorded the whole conversation." He

nods his head with the melting ice cream in his hand.

"If you ruin my rug with your ice cream you will but me a new one." He looks at his hand and then licks the melting ice cream before handing it to me. "What am I supposed to do with it? I'm trying to lose weight."

"One scoop wont kill you." He stands up and wipes his hands on his overalls. "I have to go. I got your wine. It's in the cooler already."

"Wine?" I question. I'm not even supposed to drink wine.

"You said your friends are coming over tonight and you asked me to buy wine this morning." And then I remember I have a get together with my friends. And since I can't go out we decided to meet here.

"Oh yeah. Thanks."

"I have to go somewhere. I'll come pick up Phila later."

"Sure. No problem. She can sleep over if she wants."

"Yeah we will see. Let me go." He turns and leaves.

I take Hlelo and go to the lounge. Phila is watching cartoons so I leave her and head to the kitchen. I'd even forgotten my friends were coming over, I was supposed to get some ingredients to make some finger foods. I text Pinky and ask her for the number of the restaurant we usually use for events at work. She sends me the number and I call and order the food. They promise to deliver in three hours. Perfect. One less thing to worry about.

I get some snacks and join those two in the lounge. The way Hlelo is so engrossed on these cartoons you would think she knows what is going on. But this can't be an every day thing. She is still young for that. My phone beeps, I check and it's an email. I open it and it's a reply from the president of Duncan's company. He is thanking me for sending him the recording and he promises the whole thing will be sorted out soon. I hope his soon is not twenty years

from now.

Two hours later I start setting up for the get together. I get the glasses out and set the table with Phila's help. When we are done I give Hlelo her bath and feed her. I pump four of bottles of milk, I still can't believe my c cup boobs can produce that much milk. I should actually bottle this milk and sell it. Make sure it's cheaper than formula so more people can buy. That's a business idea right there.

The food has been delivered, the wine is cool and my grape juice is ready too. Makhosi comes back as promised to take Phila home. He decides to take Hlelo with him, it's only for a couple of hours anyway and I'm sure her grandparents will be happy to see her. Unfortunately for me when he walk out my friends walk in and I dont miss the looks on their faces. He leaves and the girls stare at me like I've grown a horn on my forehead.

"Wine anyone?" I ask opening a bottle chardonnay. Thobile takes the bottle from me and puts it on the kitchen counter.

"Before we get drunk, are you and baby daddy back together?" She asks and these two nod their heads waiting for an answer.

"No we are not back together. Can we drink now?"

"One more question, are you atleast getting some?" Simz asks scrunching her face.

"I just had a baby." Clearly they need to be reminded of the fact. "Can we please forget about Makhosi and focus on why we are here." I take the bottle of wine and pour for them. I hand them their glasses.

"We are here for gossip and baby daddy counts as gossip. So spill." Simz says dragging me to the couch. We sit down and they all stare at me.

"Seriously you guys, nothing is going on. We are just co parenting. And that's where it all ends. We are co parents." They look at each other and sip their wine.

"If you say so." Pinky says and they clink their glasses.

"Even co parents can smash every once in a while. Besides, they say ayidli ipapa. (It doesn't eat pap.) Who wants to trade friends?

"Can we forget about Makhosi for a second."

"Fine. How did the meeting go." Pinky asks.

"Horrible. That son of a bitch tried to get me to sleep with him."

"WHAT?" They ask in unison. I explain to them everything that happened. And of course they go on to throw around some profanities I'm sure even the devil is scared right now.

"I still don't understand what made him think he can get lucky with you." Simz says her mind seeming to be calculating.

"It sounds more like a set up to be honest." Thobile answers. "I mean if the man came ready to get some clearly some one whispered in his ear that you're

easy."

"But who would do something like that?" Pinky asks.

"Beats me. Can I drink wine while breastfeeding?"

Yes I know, what I eat the baby eats too but I've already pumped her bottles for the night and one glass wont hurt. Right?

I pour myself a glass and the conversation moves from me to Simz. Catching up with my friends is exactly what I needed after today. We have our little dinner and laugh like crazy. Thia is all a girl needs. Makhosi comes back and the girl fuss over Hlelo. She should be sleeping but she's not. I just started with her routine, hopefully this doesn't throw her off.

The girls say their goodbyes while Makhosi takes Hlelo to the bedroom to put her down. I clean up even though I am a bit dizzy. One glass of wine and I'm tipsy. Just nine months of staying away from alcohol and all of a sudden I've become a lightweight. I feel betrayed by my own body.

When I finish cleaning up I walk into Makhosi in the passage going to the lounge. He stops right in the middle of the passage with his hands on his waist.

"Why are you drinking alcohol while breastfeeding?" That's the first thing he felt the need to ask.

"Goodnight Makhosi." I have a throbbing head he anx I'm honestly not in the mood for a fight.

"Answer me Tivikele, why would you be drinking alcohol?"

"It was just one glass and when did you become my babysitter?" I turn and walk back to the lounge with him on my heel. I throw myself on the couch and he joins me.

"Tivikele you cant be drinking alcohol while breastfeeding." He says a t bit gentler than five seconds ago.

"It was just one glass. And I made sure to pump before then so please relax." He brings me in and

hugs me. I close my eyes and take in his scent.

"I'm sorry, I shouldn't be shouting at you." I pull out of the hug and stand up.

"It's fine. I need to go to bed, my head hurts." Today really isn't my day. When I take a step away from him I trip on God knows what and I fall and face palm the floor.

"Are you Okay?" Makhosi asks hovering over me. I turn and face him.

"Can this day end." He pulls me up and holds me in his arms.

"Sorry." He whispers. Its true what they say about alcohol being liquid courage cause I stand on my tippy toes and kiss him. He kisses me back. And then I remember I am not supposed to be doing this so I pull back.

"I'm sorry I shouldn't have done that." He looks at me within his eyes slightly closed. His hand still holding on to my waist and the little pain on my forehead

making itself known. "You can let go of me now." I say rubbing my painful forehead.

"I can't." He whispers before taking my lips in his and kissing me. Logic tells me to get my head right but my body does what it does best, betraying me. I wrap my hands around his neck and stand on tippy toes to get better access to his lips. He lifts me up and lays me down on the couch. I feel his hand go up my leg and under my shorts. I havent done this in a while and right now I feel like something will go wrong. I shaved a week ago but still, what if my stretch Mark's disgust him and what if my coochie is now a gaping hole? Oh my god. He stops kissing my neck and stares at me.

"What's wrong?" He asks concern replacing lusy on his face.

"Nothing, I just....." I pull down my vest to cover my tummy and he notices. He moves my hand and lifts my vest up again and plants kisses on my abdomen.

He slowly pulls down the shorts and my insecurities go up to a hundred in seconds. I clench my thighs and he smirks.

"You do know theres nothing there that I haven't seen before right?" He says matter of factly, except he hasnt seen it since a big head popped out of my vaginaa. He gently pulls my thighs apart and takes a deep breath looking at my coochie.

He comes back and kisses me again while gently grinding on me. He moves to my neck and gently nibbles on it. His hand makes it's way down into my underwear and gently rubs on my swollen clit. I feel his hand slowly go inside me. And then Hlelo decides to be a party pooper and screams her lungs out. Makhosi buries his head on my neck and chuckles.

"So close." He whispers and kisses me. "I'll go check on her." He gets up and heads to the bedroom leaving me laying there like a nando's chicken. Is it too soon to take her to boarding school?

THE PLAYERS GUIDE

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Unedited

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Do you know an awkward situation? It's what I'm living right now. Which is quite weird considering the fact that we've had sex before, heck we even have a child to prove it. But right now we are acting like two teenagers who were caught making out in our parents house. It's been two days and things are awkward. I need a break from this house otherwise I am going to suffocate.

After Makhosi leaves to make his deliveries I decide to take Hlelo out to the mall. A bit of retail therapy will be helpful. I get her dressed up before I take my shower. When I'm done I get back to the bedroom and I'm welcomed by the most disgusting stench. I

sniff around and the smell seems to be coming from my bed. Right where Hlelo is laying. I say a silent prayer hoping its not what I think it is. The closer I get to her the stronger the stench is. I pull the tiny blanket off of her and the stench hits my mouth and my nose simultaneously.

I close my mouth and nose and open the windows wide.

"That is so unladylike you know that?" I say with my mouth still closed. I look at her playing while laying in a pool of her own poop. This child. Now I have to give her another bath. I go to the bathroom and turn the water on in the tub. When its warm enough I go pick her up and dunk her in with her clothes on. She loves water so she is happy to be in here. Not for me though because now I have to dip my hands in poop filled water. Great.

Once I've cleaned her up I get her out of the water and wrap her in a towel and take her back to the

bedroom. My duvet cover stinks like hell. I get her dressed up and clean the room. After an hour my duvet cover is in the wash and baby is ready to go.

When we get to the mall we do a bit of shopping before popping into a restaurant for lunch. I ask for a secluded table just to have some privacy. I make my order. While I'm busy tending to Hlelo I notice a familiar face. I look carefully and its Adebowale Joshua, and he is not alone. He is with Duncan. Interesting.

I take my phone and dial Alex's number. He answers after the second ring.

"Miss Majola."

"Alex, tell me something, how does Wale and Duncan know each other?"

"Uhm they went to school together. Why?" This explains everything. This whole contract was bogus from the get go.

"I am looking at the two of them having lunch right now?"

"Please dont tell me Wale put Duncan up to this whole thing?"

"I'm thinking about it. Tell me how do you know Duncan?"

"We know each other through business circles. Shit." I'm not sure what he just punched but I heard him bang something as if he just had a mindblowing realization. "That's why he came to me."

"What?"

"Wale sent Duncan to me because he knows you work with Joshua Industries and Wale doesn't have any executive powers so he sent his friend to me cause he knew you wouldn't question anything coming from me."

"So the contract was bogus from the start?"

"Clearly. I cant believe that son of a bitch could be that petty."

"Its Wale what did you expect. Anyways thanks for

the info. Goodbye."

"Dont do anything stupid."

"Lil old me. Never."

I hang up the phone and call the waitress over.

"Is everything okay?" She asks a bit nervous. I'm sure it's cause I havent touched my food and its getting cold.

"Everything is fine. I just saw a couple of friends I'd like to greet but I dont want to disturb the baby.

Could you watch her for me for just a minute. I'll be right back." The panic on her face melts away.

"Of course."

"Thank you." I leave them and walk to the pretty boys table.

"Gentlemen." They both look up at me. I pull up a seat from the next table and take a seat. "Friends huh?" I look from one to the other before looking

back again. "How are your balls Mr James." I put my elbow on the table and rest my chin on it looking at Duncan. "What does he have on you? He must have something on you cause there is no way you would put your career on the line for this douchebag." I point at Wale and I can see from the corner of my eye that he is fuming.

"What do you want?" Duncan asks and I can see his jaws clenching in anger.

"What do I want? Really? You flew all the way from London to South Africa to fuck up your career for this little boy. What does he have on you?" He keeps quiet. I turn to the little boy sitting across from him. "And you. Really? Are you so petty that you'd try to get your friend to sleep with me so you can exert your revenge? How old are you?" Wale sits close to me with his arms on the table.

"I should be running Joshua Industries right now if it wasnt for your meddling in family affairs." Is it

possible for a thirty something years old man to suffer from dementia, because I'm pretty sure this one is suffering from Dementia.

"Meddling? Me? Have you completely forgotten how this whole thing played out or you're just pretending? Either way, if you ever had any ambitions to get back on top at Joshua Industries this little stunt just ruined your chances. And to make matters worse you tried to use your cousin to get to me. How stupid are you? Don't answer that." I turn back to Duncan. "Are you still in the country because you know they can't fire your ass via email? Shem, all you're doing is delaying the inevitable." I push the chair back and stand up. I turn back to Wale. "I'm not sure what plan you had and what you thought would happen but know this, having a vagina doesn't make me weak, and if a fight is what you want I'll gladly deliver." A smirk forms on his face as he sits back to look at me.

"What are you going to do? Tell my dad? What? You have no proof I was involved in any of whatever you

are on about." Well he is right, I have no proof. Right now the only person who is implicated is Duncan.

"There is one thing you're forgetting. Your father has zero faith in you that is why he is grooming Alex to take over from him. Now imagine what he will do when Alex tells him you tried to set him up?" His little smug look disappears and anger takes over. "You didn't think this through dumbfuck. And now you're going to pay for it." I leave them and head back to my table.

"I hope she didn't give you any trouble?" I ask the waitress. She smiles and puts Hlelo back in her stroller.

"No. She is an angel. Can I warm up your food?"

"No, please make it a takeaway. And bring me the bill."

"No problem." She takes the plate and walks away. I get my phone and call the only person I know who can teach these two idiots a lesson they will never forget. He picks up on the first ring.

"Tivikele."

"Bhuti. I need your help." I narrate everything that's happened with Wale and Duncan.

"Send me their pictures I'll do the rest." I do as told but I won't bother asking what the 'rest' is. Mabutho is usually my go to brother when i need help with anything, well more like legit help. Bahole is the one I turn to when I need illegal help. All I know is that he is friends with dodgy people and se of them come in handy when something needs to be taken 'care off'.

The waitress brings my food and the bill. I pay, making sure to leave her a fat tip. I walk out of the restaurant going to the parking lot. Before I get to the entrance I notice that there are a couple of guys that are following me. Maybe I'm a bit paranoid but I know what it feels like when someone is just walking behind you and I know what it feels like when you're being followed, and right now, I know I'm being followed. I get into the shop that's close to the

entrance and look around a bit. Sure enough the two guys appear at the entrance. They talk to each other about something then one of them walks towards the entrance while the other one gets into the shop.

If I was alone it would be easy to lose them but with Hlelo, it would be near impossible. I decide to call Makhosi for help.

"Hey, what's up?"

"Can you come pick us up. We are at the mall."

"Whats wrong?"

"Maybe I'm being paranoid but just come get us. Please." I plead with my voice now shaking.

"Okay, send me a pin and I'll be there." I hang up the phone and send him the exact location of where I am.

Twenty minutes later he walks through the door and looks around. He is not alone, he is with his friend Ndalo. When he sees me he rushes to us and gives

me a hug.

"Are you Okay? What's wrong?" He questions, worry all over his face.

"There is a guy behind me, black jacket with a red hoodie underneath. Maybe I'm being a scaredy cat but I think he is following me. He was with another guy but the other one is probably waiting outside the entrance." They both look up and look at the guy.

"He does look a bit suspicious. Has he been here the whole time you've been here?" Ndalo asks looking around the shop.

"Yes."

"Okay. Let's go. I'll drive you home and Ndalo will bring your car."

I hand Ndalo car keys and we walk out of the shop. I tell him where I'm parked and we part ways. Makhosi leads us to where his car is parked. He is driving the delivery truck. Dear Lord, where is Hlelo supposed to be?

"Really?" He looks at me almost laughing.

"What? It's not like you've never been in the truck before."

"The issue isn't the truck. Where are we going to put Hlelo's car seat?"

"At the back. Hlelo will be on your lap." He takes her out of the stroller and hands her to me then proceeds to disassemble the stroller and puts everything in the back of the truck. He comes back and takes her from me then helps me into the truck before handing her back again. This is not how i saw this going.

He gets on the other side and looks at me with a smug look on his face.

"It's not funny."

"Trust me it is. Your friend is following you again." I look out the window as we drive out and the guy is standing by a dustbin talking to someone on the phone. For his sake I hope Wale is not behind this.

"Does this have anything to do with that Duncan guy?"

"Probably. Anyway I found out Wale was behind the whole thing. But Bahole is taking care of it."

"Taking care of it how?"

"I dont know."

"Why didnt you tell me?" He looks ate like I've just committed one of the worst sins in the world by not telling him.

"I did tell you."

"No you told me about the guy trying to sleep with you not who is behind the whole thing." Okay he seems upset. Am I missing something?

"Yes but I'm telling you now so what's the big deal?"

"The big deal is how are you going to go over my head and ask your brother for help. Is it not my duty to protect my family?" I'm not sure what kind of ganja he is on but when did we become a family? We share a child together and that's all. But I'm in no mood to fight right now so I'll let him be.

"Okay then. I'm sorry. But I don't understand...."

"Understand what?" He asks through clenched teeth.

"It doesn't matter." He drives on in silence until we get home. He helps me out of the truck and we wait for his friend to drive in. I get my car keys and head up to my place while they both drive out. I get to my apartment and put Hlelo down for her nap in her rocker. I take my phone out of my bag and call my mum.

"Hi baby."

"Hi ma. I need advice."

"I'm listening." I tell her everything that just happened minus the whole Duncan and Wale story. "Why didn't you tell him that you needed help?"

"I don't know, maybe cause he is not my boyfriend."

"Well he clearly doesn't see it that way. He is Hlelo's father and you're the mother of his child, he feels like he is your protector."

"Okay I get that, but why does he have to be upset about it. I mean I've always asked my brothers for help it's not like I asked some other man. Bahole is my brother."

"I understand that but he is a man and he has an ego. And if you get married you can't leave your husband in the house and go ask your brothers for anything." I thought mjolo was complicated but now it seems even coparenting is another mountain to climb.

"I hear you. I guess I have to apologize to him." For God knows what, I don't know but for the sake of peace, i just have to.

I hang up. My mother always says the way to a mans heart is through his stomach so maybe some oxtail will do the trick. I would make it but I'm too tired so I order some from the African restaurant down the road. Makhosi will be back soon so hopefully by the time he gets here the food will also be here. While I wait for the food to arrive I get a text from Thobile saying I have a delivery. I also get a call from

security about a delivery so I ask them to let the delivery guy up. A gee minutes later he knocks on the door. I open and sign up for it. When I open the package I find a huge black dildo. I take my phone and call her.

"Really?" She laughs her lungs out. I don't know what's amusing honestly.

"We figured since you said you were not getting some then blacky could help." Blacky? And she said we. That means all three of them are in on this. I need a refund on the friends i keep.

"Go fuck yourself. Thobile." She laughs again.

"I would babe, but I have a man for that. Byeeeeee." She hangs up still laughing. Mxm.

The food arrives and I take it out of the takeaway containers and put it in pots dishes. I even added dumplings and chakalaka, shem, I'd make a proper wife. Bahole texts me soon after that asking me to

call him because apparently I have endless airtime. I call him.

"Who are you saving your airtime for cause I know you dont have a girlfriend." I say as soon as he picks up.

"Keep thinking that."

"When are you getting married?"

"You sound like your mother. Anyways I wanted to tell you it's been taken care off."

"So soon? What did you do?"

"Nothing much. I asked a friend of mine to look at those guys and they found cameras in the British guys room. I'm thinking had you agreed to sleep with him it would have happened in the room and they would have recorded the whole thing."

"Then used it against me!"

"Precisely."

"So what did you do?"

"Ask no questions hear no lies. You'll read all about it in tomorrow's news. Bye." He hangs up and I let out a breath of fresh air. We might fight like cats and dogs sometimes but my brothers always come through for me. Always.

Makhosi walks in to the smell of oxtail and I can see a slight smile on his face. He is happy even though he is trying to hide it. One point for me.

"You cooked?" He asks opening the pots and taking a piece of meat.

"Kind off. Are you hungry?"

"I could eat." He answers looking at the package on the counter. Shit. I quickly rush up to take it but he gets to it before I can. "What's this?"

"Just some female stuff. Can I have my package."

"What's inside?"

"Pads. Do you want to see?"

"No thanks." He hands me the package. Thank you Jesus. I quickly rush to the bedroom and hide the box in the closet.

When I get back to the lounge he has already dished up for himself and is sitting on the couch eating. I sit down next to him.

"Can I ask you something?" He nods his head cause he has food in his mouth. "What are we?" He stops chewing and looks at me.

"We are people." He answers with a mischievous smile on his face.

"You're not funny." He chuckles and puts the plate on the coffee table.

"We are Hlelo's parents, but if it were up to me we would be more than that. I know why we arent more than that and I know i havent given you enough reason to trust me but I'd like to believe one day you will."

"I do trust you." I never thought I'd see the day I say

that and actually mean it.

"You dont have to lie to me. I know how easy it is for trust to be broken and how hard it is to get it back. I don't blame you for not trusting me."

"Makhosi I do trust you. Maybe not a hundred percent but ninety five percent is also a distinction right?" He smiles and takes my hands in his.

"I guess I still have work to do to get that five percent."

"You could start by taking me out on a first date. The other one doesn't count."

"I thought you didn't do dates."

"Every rule has exception." His face lights up and he pushes me back on the couch kissing me. We kiss for a while and I can feel his hand going up my dress. I hold his hand and he stops kissing me and looks at me.

"What's wrong?" I turn to look at Hlelo who is

gawking at us. He chuckles and gets off me.

"You're a party pooper you know that right?" He tells her while picking her up. All she does is giggle and smile. Maybe Makhosi was right. We are a family. Flawed but still family nonetheless. And I am glad we got to this part ourselves without interference, well maybe just minor family interference.

THE PLAYERS GUIDE

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Unedited

First days can be daunting. Today is my first day back at work. I dont know why I'm nervous. Hlelo is officially four months old. Babies grow up way too fast to be honest. As parents we should be given the option to pause their growth, even for just a couple of months. I found a nanny for her, but I still have trust issues so Phila has agreed to help the nanny. To be honest though it's more than just helping, i need her to watch over her and make sure she follows every thing on the list I gave her. Yes, I've turned into that kind of mum who in all honesty doesn't really trust anyone around their child.

Makhosi walks into the bedroom with Hlelo in his arms. Today he is not in his usual overalls, which is a

nice change, but I kind off miss the overalls, he looks good in a suit but even better in overallss. He walks over to me as I stand in front of the mirror trying to figure out if the black power suit I'm wearing is appropriate for today. He wraps his one arm around my neck and gives me a kiss on the cheek. Our relationship is on a steady upward trajectory.

"You look perfect." He lets go of my neck and sits on the bed watching me. I twist and turn trying to find the perfection he sees but nothing. I don't see it.

"Nope. it's too serious." I take the blazer off and throw it on the pile of clothes I've worn and taken off just this morning alone. He shakes his head laughing.

"You do realise you'll be late for your first day back at work right?" I take a red midi pleated skirt and pair it with a white shirt and red stiletto pumps. I turn to look at him.

"What do you think?" He smiles his eyes roam up and down my body.

"Perfect." I turn back to the mirror and I look good. I'm not sure about perfect but I'm almost late so this outfit will have to do.

"Okay. I think I'm ready to go. What time is the nanny getting here anyway?" It's almost seven thirty and she was supposed to be here at seven. I hope she is not ditching me at the last minute.

"She was supposed to be here twenty minutes ago."

"I know. And I need to be at work. I can't afford to miss today."

"Go to work. I'll stay with Hlelo until the nanny gets here."

"And if she doesn't come?"

"I'm pretty sure I can survive a few hours alone with my daughter." He says. I let out a loud sigh and get my handbag and laptop bag.

I take a seat on the bed next to him and Hlelo. I'm not sure how I'm going to survive being away from her for so long. What if she thinks I abandoned her?

My poor baby. I kiss her chubby little cheeks and she smiles. I stand up again and look at them both.

"I should get going." I blink my eyes a few times to stop the tears from running out. The whole day today I will have to remind myself why I need to be at work. I am building a legacy for her. Makhosi notices the glistening tears and stands up. He brings time in for a hug which is a bad idea because the tears win and they run down my face. Good thing I'm not wearing any make up, thanks to my mother's perfect skin genes and a good skincare routine.

"Stop stressing. Hlelo and I will be fine if the nanny doesn't come. All you need to do is go and make that money. I know you love being a mummy but I know you love your work too. And both those things can coexist perfectly fine." He says while my head lays on his chest and Hlelo keeps poking me. She's a bit territorial when it comes to her dad.

"Then why does it feel like I am choosing work over my own child? It's like I am abandoning her." He

holds me away from him and looks at me.

"Listen to me, you are a great mum and Hlelo knows it too. You can do this. I know you can. Just take a few deep breaths and remember who you were before she came along. Merge that girl with the great mum that you are and the rest will fall into place." I'm not sure what he is trying to say but he is being motivational right now so I'll just nod my head and agree. I wipe my tears, kiss my baby and then kiss my man.

"Okay then. Here goes." I walk out of the bedroom with the two of them behind me. I'm too nervous to eat. I get to the door and turn around to look at them. "I'll see you later." I kiss him again and then kiss Hlelo.

"Break a leg." He opens the door for me and I walk out.

I get to work and find Pinky already waiting with my coffee and a muffin. She's a star this one.

"Hey you, how are you?"

"I'm good. Welcome back." She has a weird look in her eyes. She doesn't look as happy as I thought she would be.

"Is everything okay?" She fakes a smile and her hands go behind her back.

"Everything is fine." I know she's lying but I'll let her be for now. I have a lot of paper work to catch up on.

I walk to my office with her silently walking behind me. Even though she said everything is fine the Pinky I know would be telling me about any and every drama I missed out on when I was away, this Pinky walking behind me is making me feel uneasy. I open the door to my office and the first thing I see is my desk still sitting by the wall and not by the window where I prefer it to be. I walk in slowly and look around. Nothing has changed since I was last here. Khwezi's portrait is still hung on the wall. Her photos with her husband and kids are also on the desk. I look at the calendar and it's there, clear as

daylight, today is the third of August, the day I am supposed to come back to work. Everyone knows that. She knows it too so why is her stuff still here? I turn to Pinky and she can't even look at me in the eyes. What am I missing?

"Pinky, what's going on?" She takes a couple of steps back.

"I have to go back to the front desk. Khwezi will be here soon, she'll explain everything." She turns to walk out.

"Pinky." She stops by the door and turns to, I would say look at me but her eyes are roaming all over the place so that would be a lie. "What is going on?" She mumbles an I'm sorry and walks out.

I place the cup of coffee and muffin on the desk. Now I need to rearrange my office. I place my bags on the couch and roll my sleeves up. I clearly have work to do. I pull the desk towards the window.

"I actually prefer it by the wall." I stop pulling and look up to find Khwezi standing by the door with her bags.

"That's nice. But since this is my office I'd like my desk by the window. You did get the memo that I was coming back right?" She smiles and sashays into the office. into the office. She places her bags on the desk and stands close to me. Way to close.

"About that. Please come with me." She turns and walks to the door. I stand there watching her, not sure if i should follow her or stay put. She stops by the door and looks at me. "Come." She walks out the door. Now I'm curious to know what's happening.

I grab my phone and follow her out. She silently walks a step in front of me. We get to the boardroom and she opens the for me. I walk in to a whole nightmare. Wale and Duncan are inside.

"Have a seat." Khwezi motions with her hand. Duncan and Wale are looking at me with some

satisfied looks on their faces. I take a seat and wait for them to say something.

"How are you Miss Majola." Wale asks sitting forward with his arms on the huge table. I keep quiet and wait for them to proceed with their little gathering. "You must be curious to know why we are here." If I ever run into him in a dark alleyway I would put a bullet between his eyes, if I wasnt afraid of going to jail.

"I have a lot of catching up to do so if you will please get to the point of why I am here right now, I would really appreciate it." The three of them look at each other with some satisfied grins on their faces.

"We will. As soon as our last guest gets here." Khwezi tells me. This whole thing is getting bizarre by the second.

"What guest?" The door opens again and Mabutho walks in with Pinky behind him. Okay, that's a relief. But what business does he have with them? He

takes a seat across from me and gives me a faint smile. Pinky takes a seat next to him. I look at him hoping he will give me some sort of clue on what is happening but nothing.

"Okay then. Now that we are all here, let's get down to business. Miss Majola, we won't waste your time." Wale begins and everyone is listening to him like he is the president himself. My eyes are still glued on Mabutho. "Miss Majola, T.N.M Technologies will no longer be requiring your services." He announces. I turn to look at him hoping I heard wrong.

"Excuse me?"

"T.N.M Technologies no longer belongs to you. It's now owned by D.W Holdings." This has to be the joke of the century.

"I'm not sure what kind of drugs you are on but you need to quit. Or better yet give me the name of your dealer, I'd like to float on air like you." He chuckles and turns to Mabutho.

"Big brother, would you like to explain to your sister what is going on?" Mabutho turns to look at me. I look at him, he still has blank look on his face. What the hell is going on?

"Tee, do you trust me?" He asks.

"Of course I trust you. What's going on?"

"I want you to know that everything we have done was to protect you. Everything we have done has been for your own good."

"Seriously Mabutho stop beating around the bush and tell me what is going on." He takes a deep breath.

"We sold the company."

I'm pretty sure something is wrong with my ears because there is no way my brother just said that. This has to be a prank.

"You two share a dealer?" I ask point at Wale. They laugh as if I said something funny.

"I'm serious sis wam. T.N.M Technologies is no longer under your ownership. Wale and Duncan own it now." He tells me. I feel like someone just punched me on the face and now I am seeing stars. My brother would not betray me like that. He wouldn't. My head and my soul refuse to believe this. Wale pushes a file towards me. I open it and sure enough there are documents supporting that statement. Since I gave both him and Khwezi power of attorney, none of them can make major decisions without the other, so they both decide to sell my company.

I look down at the bottom of the page and both their signatures and initials are there, clear. They sold my company and they sold it to my worst enemy. I feel my heart beating out of control. I'm pretty sure the perspiration on my forehead is clear for everyone to see. I wipe my face and rub my eyes.

"Mabutho, please tell me this is a joke."

"It's not a joke sweetheart." Wale says standing up. He walks around the table and stands behind Khwezi

with his hands on her shoulders. She sits there with a huge smile on her face. "The lovely Khwezi will be permanently taking over from you." I turn to look at Mabutho and he is busy on his phone.

"Mabutho." I whisper, tears ready to be released. He looks up at me and for a brief second I see my brother, the one who would protect me no matter what. "Please tell me you didnt do this?" I want to stand up and leave this room because its suffocating me right now but I dont think my legs can carry me anywhere at this point. Wale's cologne fills my nostrils as he bends behind me and leans over my shoulder.

"You thought you could play me right?" He whispers way too close to my ear. "You took away my company, I guess now we are even huh bitch. Karma is a bitch isnt it." He stands up and goes back to his seat. "Now, you have ten minutes to get any trace of you out of this building. And we are changing the name to D.W Technologies. It's got a nice ring to it right?" He says with a huge grin on his face.

I've never felt so defeated in my entire life. It can't be that everything I've worked for can go up in flames just like that, and my brother be the one who lit the match. I stand up ready to walk out of this boardroom and come up with a solid plan to get my company back, because there is no way I'm just letting it go. This is my life's work. I will not let it go just like that.

My phone beeps. I check the message and it's from Makhosi, he tells me he is here. I take a couple of steps towards the door and stop when someone opens from the outside. Makhosi and Bahole walk in with some guy I don't know. Everyone turns to look at them. I'm not sure who to trust anymore so I just stand still and wait for them to say something.

"Who the fuck are you?" Wale asks as he and Duncan stand up.

"Hi sis." Bahole says. After today's surprise

announcement I'll just keep my mouth shut until whatever game is being played right now comes to an end. The boardroom is now filled with way too much tensionn. Wale and Duncan are on their feet glaring at Bahole and Makhosi. Bahole, Makhosi and this new guy are watching Wale ready to kill. This feels almost like I am watching a movie.

"Please tell me the meeting is not over yet." Bahole says his eyes still glued on Wale.

"Who the fuck are you and what are you doing here?" Wale screams banging the table. Mabutho stands up and looks at Wale.

"Wale, let me introduce you to my brother Bahole Majola, Bahole, this is the famous Wale and Duncan."

"And what are they doing here?" Wale asks anger pouring out of his ears.

"I wasnt done with the introductions, that other guy is Makhosi, Tivikele's baby daddy, and that is Detective Matthew Ngubane, he is working with the

Human trafficking task team." Mabutho tells him.

"That's nice and all but what are they doing here?"

"It's simple really, I have questions and you have answers." The Detective speaks. He walks to where Wale and Duncan are standing. He takes out a piece of paper from his pocket and places it on the table in front of them. "Does this look familiar to you?" They both look at the paper and there is some sort of realization that dawns on them.

"That's the offshore account we transferred the funds to buy the company to. What's this about?" Duncan asks.

"Which company did you buy?"

"This one. We have the paperwork to prove it." They look around for the file but it seems to have disappeared. "The file was right here. It was on the table just now." Wale insists looking around. He looks at me and sees that I have nothing on me except my phone. Confusion replaces the anger he had just a few minutes ago. "Mabutho, tell them we

bought the company. Tell them!" He screams at my brother.

Being in a cinema is less entertaining than this I swear.

"I have no idea what you mean." Mabutho tells him. Terror and fear wash over him like rain water.

"We had a deal man." Duncan whispers.

"A deal for me to betray my sister? And you thought I would do it. How dumb are you?" Mabutho asks him.

"We paid you, we signed the documents and we changed the ownership of the company. You signed for that." Mabutho, Bahole and Makhosi laugh.

"They didn't sign for anything. T.N.M Technologies is still fully owned by their sister and you my brother, the only thing you paid for was a group of girls who had been abducted all over Joburg and were rescued on their way to Durban where they would have been shipped to different countries to be sold as sex

slaves. So you my friends are under arrest for human trafficking. You'll give me more answers at the station." The Detective tells them. He whistles and ten other officers walk into the small boardroom and cuff the two of them. They drag them out kicking and screaming.

When they are gone I am left with my brothers, my baby daddy and my two employeeess. They all turn to look at me, I guess expecting something but they get nothing. I have too many questions right now. But the one I cant get out of my head is where those girls came from. For their sake I hope they did not go around abducting girls for this because if they did, God help them.

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Unedited

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We've been standing here for about a minute now. I'm still trying to process everything that just happened and my mind still can't comprehend anything right now. And these people I'm supposed to trust with my life are standing there looking at me like I'm some crazy person. I pull the chair I was sitting on and sit down.

"Are you Okay?" Makhosi asks rushing to stand next to me and rub my back. I take deep breaths counting down from ten. I need to calm myself down before I open my mouth and say something.

"Tivikele?" Mabutho calls my name sitting across from me. I open my eyes and look at him. "Say something." I hear panic in his voice. I take one last

deep breath.

"Please explain to me what just happened." They all look at each other and then their eyes land on Khwezi. I guess their eyes carry a message that she receives very well. She takes a step forward and sits down next to Mabutho.

"Well. A few weeks ago I was approached by Wale with a business proposition. He said he wanted to collaborate with T.N.M Technologies on a deal he was working on with Duncan's company. I remembered that he once offered you a job and you didn't trust him so I knew his offer was a bit suspicious. I called Mabutho when I couldn't get a hold of you. You were in Limpopo I think plus you were on maternity leave anyways. Mabutho told me to get as much information from him as I could so I did. I pretended to be excited about the offer and we worked. And since we have power of attorney it was easy for him to believe the supposed contract would be signed. I then told him that for international contracts we would need your signature, and chances of you signing on anything that involves him

would be impossible and that's where Duncan came in. He was supposed to seduce you, they would film you and then blackmail you into signing the contract."

"So you let him approach me knowing he had his own motives? What if I had agreed to sleep with him?" They laugh. Am I a joke to them? "What's funny?"

"Oh come on Tivikele we all know that would have never happened." Pinky chimes in, a bit more chirped than she seemed an hour ago. "We all know you and how you operate. We know you'd rather lose a contract and start from scratch before compromising your ethics and morals when it comes to business." So much faith.

"Continue." I say looking at Khwezi.

"Okay, as we expected the seduction didn't go as planned. So plans had to change. The deal then changed from a collaborative effort to them buying the company." She narrates.

"And after you called me asking for help with Wale

and Duncan I called Mabutho so we could figure out what we could do to get the man out of your life for good. And that's when they told me about what has been happening. So we made the decision to make them believe Khwezi would sell the company to them in exchange she runs it as a permanent CEO and for her to get shares as well. They bought it and everything was done. Now the tricky part was getting Mabutho to sign on the dotted line too. So a bit of blackmail was put on the table. Khwezi would seduce Mabutho, photos would be taken and then he would be blackmailed, knowing Mabutho and being overprotective of his reputation and wanting to maintain his clients trust in him he was 'blackmailed'. Of course we had to get Khwezi's husband on board too or else this would not work. Mabutho signed on the dotted line and the deal was sealed." Bahole tells me. This feels like an out of body experience. I know I've asked for help but the scheming that's been going around behind my back is far worse than I thought.

I turn the chair around and look at Makhosi who has

been standing behind me the whole time. Quite ironic really, while I was having my own doubts and questions about him he was standing behind me, figuratively speaking and literally.

"So, where do you enter in all this?" I ask him. He smiles. I wonder who is he trying to charm.

"A friend of mine, Lubanzi, he is a school principal at a high school. A few years ago one of his students was abducted on her way back from school. Lubanzi and the girls dad worked hard to find her, even after the cops had given up. A few months later they found the girl in a Hillbrow brothel where she was drugged and raped and forced to sleep with different men. After that they started something like a task force to help other families. They work with Detective Ngubane and they've helped bust a number of human trafficking syndicates."

"So the girls came from them?"

"Yep. They found a few girls that were being prepared to be shipped out of the country. They found out the sellers and their information, got their

offshore accounts, and since the girls would have been auctioned off the money Wale and Duncan 'paid' for the company was paid to the traffickers as a deposit for a few girls.. The buyers are always anonymous especially when the auctions are held online so it was easy for the buyers to accept the money. Now the money traces back to them that's why they are headed to jail as we speak."

"I think this calls for a celebration." Pinky announces. "I'll get the champagne." She walks out. I slowly turn to look everyone.

"Are you Okay?" Bahole asks me.

Am I okay? I guess. My company is safe, Wale is out of my life, basically everything is the way its supposed to be, but I cant help the feelings that have somehow consumed me. When I started this company I was on some super hero mode. No one could tell me what to do and what not to do. I was determine to run this company my way, grow it and get it to the top and still be able to say I did it myself. But truth of the matter is no person is an island. And today just proved it. While I was busy taking care of

my baby some people were plotting to take all my hardwork and leave me with nothing. And if anybody else had been sitting on the CEO chair, even as an acting CEO they would not have done what Khwezi has done. Someone else would have gladly taken all my hardwork and sold it for whatever they felt my hardwork was worth. Who needs avengers when I have these people fighting for me even when I'm not there.

Pinky comes in with the kitchen tray with an ice bucket, two bottles of champagne and glasses.

"Okay then. Let's do this." She hands Mabutho a bottle and another one goes to Bahole. They pop the bottles and pour the bubbling liquid into the glasses. They pass them around and wait for me to speak and make a toast. I look around this room and my heart swells up with pride and gratitude.

"I dont know what I did to deserve all of you but I pray to God I keep doing it. Heres to T.N.M Technologies, still standing and still soaring."

"Here here." We lift our glasses up and toast.

I walk into my office again after that mini celebration and things are back to where they are meant to be. My desk is sitting right in front of the huge window. There's no trace of Khwezi, I guess whoever was cleaning up here took her things back to her office. I walk around the office before settling on the couch deep in thought. The door opens and Khwezi walks in, a smile covering her face. She comes and sits next to me.

"Hey, are you okay?"

"I thought I was losing my company."

"I know. I'm sorry for not telling you, but we needed for Wale to believe he was winning, you know how arrogant he gets when he thinks he is on top." I release the air I've been holding in since I got here this morning.

"I know, I just... I don't know, for those few minutes it

felt like a knife had been stuck through my beating heart then twisted. I thought you had betrayed me. Worse, even Mabutho was in on it." She chuckles and turns to look at me.

"Tivikele, you're one of the most hardworking women I know. You work hard and you play hard, somehow you've find a balance between the two, you have a strong fearless personality and anyone who knows you knows that, Mabutho would walk through the gates of hell and fight satan before betraying you. And I would do the same. I've worked with you for a few years now and its understandable why people never want to quit. You treat us more like family and a team than just employees. Look at Sphetho, he came here as a volunteer and a year later he is still here. He even studies part time now so he can have more time for work. That says more about the leadership in this place."

"I guess."

"There are no guessing games here, it's the truth. Come, I want to show you something." She stands up and holds out her hand. I take it and allow her to

lead me to the cafeteria.

When we get there its more quiet than it normally is. She pushes the door open and walks in. I follow her and people pop out of everywhere screaming surprises. A pink banner with the words "it's a girl" is released from the ceiling. Balloons pop out of only God knows where.

"See, a team." She says as my team comes forward to hug me and hand me presents.

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As badly as this day began it looks like it will end on a good note. I walk into the apartment to the smell of something amazing being cooked. I look around and I hear Hlelo's cooing sounds coming from the kitchen. I follow the sounds and find her on my mother's back clearly having the time of her life. Mum is on the stove cooking. I tiptoe to them. Hlelo sees me first. Her smile just lightens my heart. I hug them both and mum squeals with laughter.

"And now?"

"What are you doing here?"

"Surprise." She says and closes the pot of oxtail.

"I've officially had enough surprises to last me the whole year. I dont need anymore thank you very much." She laughs while untying the knot of the towel holding Hlelo. I dont know how she is even able to hold her with that. I havent got to the part where I carry her on my back because of paranoia. What if she falls of my back. I would die a thousand deaths.

"How was your first day?"

"Dramatic. I hope to the heavens above I never get to relive this day. It was enough to give me ulcers."

"I can imagine." She takes out a couple of teacups from the cupboard and fills them up with water. She makes the tea and hands it to me with a cupcake next to it.

"So when did you get here?"

"A few hours ago. I saw your nanny." She says the

last part with a look I can't quite read.

"Oh, so she finally showed up. I need to speak to her about being late."

"There wont be a need. I released her off her duties." I stop chewing the cupcake and look at her.

"What do you mean?" She sips her tea like she didnt just drop a huge ass bomb on me.

"Just that. She is not going to make a good nanny." I'm pretty sure she only spent an hour tops with her and she's already concluded that she is not fit to be a nanny. How?

"I dont understand. She is a qualified nanny, she is trained for this job mum."

"That's good for her but bad for you." She goes to check her pots and sits down again on the highchair.

"Bad for me how?"

"She is going to take your man. What many wears a skimpy outfit while she is working. And to make matters worse Makhosi was here."

"I still dont see what wrong she did." Her face

scrunches and her head tilts to the side. I know that look, it's the look she used to give us when she didn't want to say 'are you stupid?'

"Really? Where is the professionalism. And she seemed to be asking too many questions and giggling around Makhosi like a love sick puppy. Girls like that are dangerous. They will take your man and kick you out of your own home." I chuckle and roll my eyes. "You wont be rolling those eyes when Makhosi is shacking up with her while you are here stuck alone."

"Mum, you do realise she wont take Makhosi unless he wants to be taken. He is not some acquisition I need to protect by fire by force. If he wants to leave he will leave."

"If you say so." And that is her subtle way of saying I'm older and I know better.

"Now that you've fired my nanny, I take it you will be taking care of Hlelo when I go to work." A smile creeps up on her face.

"No. Which is why we hired a new nanny."

"We?"

"Yes, MamKhuzwayo and I found the perfect nanny. She is a bit older and she has plenty of experience taking care of babies. And bonus, she wont take your man." She tells me excitement running rampant on her face.

"No, but she could have a daughter and she could convince her to 'take' my man as you put it."

"She doesnt have a daughter actually. She has three grown sons."

"One of her sons could be gay and be attracted to Makhosi. What then?"

"That wont happen. Go freshen up, food is almost ready."

I take Hlelo and go to the bathroom. This is a perfect time for a bubble bath. I fill the bathtub with water and add some bubbles. Hlelo and I get in and relax. Well I do while she plays with the bubbles. The door opens and Makhosi walks in. He smiles looking at us.

"Am I invited to this little party or it's a girls only

thing?" I shrug my shoulders.

"The tub is big enough for one more gate crasher." He chuckles and takes off his clothes. He slips into the tub behind me. I lay on his chest while Hlelo rests on my propped up legs. We sit there quietly for a while watching our baby being mesmerized by bubbles. I can't believe my life has changed so drastically in almost two years. If anyone would have told me that before my thirtieth birthday I would not only be in a serious relationship but I would be a mother too, I probably would have laughed.

"So why didn't you tell me?" I ask after a while of just silence on our part.

"Because we were trying to protect you. And we also wanted to make you realize that you don't really have to be superwoman and do everything on your own. You have an entire tribe of people behind you ready to assemble and fight with you." He says. And the tribe just got bigger as the Khuzwayo's heed the call too.

"Ngyabonga. (Thank you.) I'm truly grateful for what

you did for me. I hope one day I can repay you." I see him close his eyes and take a deep breath on the glass shower in front of us.

"I didn't do what I did for repayment Tivikele. I just wanted to help you." It sounds more like he is offended.

"I didn't mean it in a bad way. I'm just grateful for your help."

"You're welcome." Okay I know that was just to shut me up. And to avoid further offending him I decide to change the subject.

"So when did you and my brothers become best friends?" That seem to do the trick cause he smiles and shakes his head.

"We are not best friends yet but we are good. They aren't as bad as I thought they were."

"When did you ever think they were bad?"

"Are you serious? They beat me up in a club with everyone watching, yes, I did think they were bad." I throw my head back laughing. Oh how times have

changed.

"Look at you now being their favourite."

"I am charming like that."

"Speaking of favourites. Mum fired the nanny." He laughs.

"Mum told me. Apparently they found a new one and she will be here tomorrow. In a way I guess I understand their reason."

"Really?" This is a surprise to me.

"Yeah. She did come in late on her first day and that alone is already a red flag. We need someone reliable that we can trust."

I chuckle a bit at the realization that he doesn't know the rest of the reason why she was fired. I would tell him but, let me not ruin this moment. Let me just bask in the moment.

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Unedited

I've never been to jail before so this is quite weird for me. A police station I dont mind but jail, now that's just a whole different story. Or maybe it's because I watch too many movies and prison break didnt help the thoughts running through my head.

I play with my hands while sitting on the cold bench waiting for visiting hours to commence. I've been looking at the time every five seconds hoping it was almost time. I have a few more minutes before the doors open and we are allowed in. Finally the steel doors and bars open up. We are led into the visitors area. This room is cold as hell. Not the usual breezy cold air, its aura is just weird and scary. But then again it's jail, what did I expect.

Wale sits in front of me. I can't miss the hatred and raging fire in his eyes.

"Orange looks good on you." He clenches his jaw and places his handcuffed arms on the table.

"Came to see your handiwork?" I chuckle and take a good look at him. Two weeks in and he is already looking like it's the end of the world.

"Actually this time I can fully say I had nothing to do with all this."

"No, but your friends did."

"Well that's what happens when you have loyal friends and family. So has your family come to see you?" He doesn't answer, instead he keeps staring at me.

"What do you want from me Miss Majola? You won. Go on with your life and leave me the fuck alone."

"You do realise you brought this whole thing upon yourself right? I mean, you were living your life, being

groomed to take over from your father and somewhere along the line you allowed your greed to take over. Now look where that has led you. You are here, alone, Duncan is in protective custody as a states witness, Alex is taking over your father's company, and you are stuck here alone. In a foreign country even. Did you even think this is how you would end up? I know I didnt." He stands up and a guard takes a step forward.

"Leave me the fuck alone. You won. Now go enjoy your victory while it lasts." He says. I stand up and look at him in the eyes.

"You should have stayed in your line Adebowale, you should have stayed in your lane. Look at you now." I grab my bag and walk away while he is being whisked away by the guards. I get outside and get into my car. I drive out of the prison headed to work.

When I get to the office I notice Mabutho's car in the parking lot. He didnt tell me he in coming over. I walk

into the building and it seems we have a new receptionist. I greet her and head to my office. Pinky is not there. I wonder where she is because she should be training the new receptionist. My phone rings and I take it out of my bag.

"Baba."

"Please tell my wife to come home now. I miss her." Of course it had to be about his wife and not because he wanted to greet me, his daughter.

"I will pass on the message. Arent you going to ask me how I am?" He laughs.

"I know you're fine because my wife has been taking care of you for two weeks while I'm being neglected. Tell her to come home." Remind me again when do old people fall out of love?

"Speaking of home, you do remember you owe me a graduation gift right?"

"No I don't."

"Yes you do. I told you I didnt know what I wanted as

a graduation gift and you promised that when I figure it out i will tell you and then you will get it for me." He sighs and I hear him slurp up what I assume is tea.

"Okay, for arguments sake let's say you're right, what would you want as a gif"

"A house. Hlelo is growing up and I dont want her growing up in an apartment. I want her to have a tad bit more freedom."

"That's good. When are you bringing her home anyways. I miss my babygirl." And that's how he tries to change the subject.

"Do what your wife did, get on a plane and come here. And don't try and change the subject. I want my graduation gift Baba." He laughs again.

"Where are you right now?"

"In my office." He is seriously trying his best to ignore my gift. This man thinks I'm going to let this

go, never.

"Good. Then you're sitting inside your graduation gift."

"What?"

"The building you are in right now, it's yours." Now it's my turn to laugh.

"Baba, I pay rent here every month. How is this building mine if I pay rent?"

"I bought it for you since you didn't know what you wanted except that you wanted to start a business." This has to be a joke.

"So where does the rent money go then?"

"To a trust. I'm pretty sure by now there is enough for you to buy that house you want." He tells me then hangs up leaving me dumbstruck.

I sit there for a while trying to process everything he just said. I've been in this building since I started this business and I've been paying rent ever since. That's almost seventy thousand each month for seven

years. That's a whole lot of money I've been paying to me apparently.

I need coffee or tea to digest this whole thing. I call reception to see if Pinky is back from wherever she went to earlier but she is not. I get up and head to the little break room and turn the kettle on. I make my tea and head back to my office. On my way back I pass by the store room. No big deal, except I can hear some giggling coming from there. I take a step back and listen carefully, I'm not going crazy, there are people in there.

I slowly turn the door knob and it's not locked. Risky. I open and now I know why they say curiosity killed the cat. I quickly shut the door and rush back to my office. How does one unsee this? The door opens behind me and the two culprits come rushing in.

"I can explain." Mabutho says. I wonder how he is going to explain bonking my employee in the

storeroom like she is some piece of meat.

"Okay, explain." I say turning to look at them. Pinky is hiding behind her sex partner like she wasn't moaning and giggling on top of toilet paper less than five minutes ago.

"Well, we wanted to tell you." He starts. I guess he is the spokesperson for this union.

"But you didn't."

"You had a lot to deal with, the baby, family drama and Wale, we didn't want to add on to your stresses." I don't know how two people I love choosing to love each other would be stressful for me. Pinky is slowly emerging from her hideout behind Mabutho's back.

"When did this happen?"

"A few months ago." He answers.

"Okay then, I'd like to get back to work."

"Cool. I'll get your diary." Pinky says and quickly rushes out of the office.

"Please dont be too hard on her." I roll my eyes and take a seat.

"Why would I be hard on her? Besides, it was bound to happen, you two have been flirting for the longest time. So what does Crystal think about this?"

"We broke up remember?"

"I know. But you did say you still wanted to have a relationship with her son. You practically raised the boy and he loves you."

"I know. But Crystal is being hard headed about it. Apparently the baby daddy wants to have a relationship with his son so she doesnt want to confuse him."

"That's weird. So all those years you were raising Dante he wasnt confused?" He takes a seat.

"Argh, it doesn't matter. I won't force myself where I'm not needed. If she doesn't want me in her sons life then there is nothing I can do. Anyways I need to go, I have a flight in a couple of hours."

"Of course. And you came here to say your

goodbyes." He chuckles and stands up.

"Well I do need something to carry me through the long journey." Long journey my foot.

"If you say so." He chuckles and walks out. Idiot. Pinky walks back in with my diary. She takes a seat across from me not even looking at me.

"So you have two important meetings today, one in the next hour and the other just before lunch. Your afternoon is free." She looks up at me and find me staring at her. She quickly turns back to the diary.

"Do me a favor, if the two of you are going to have a quickie at work please make sure its not in the store room, you're way better than that. The office maybe, store room, no." She looks up with a smile on her face.

"Noted. I guess it's a good thing I'm getting my own office then."

"Oh God. It's bad enough I saw my brother humping

my friend now I need to live with knowing it might just happen everyday. Maybe I should ban office romance." She stands up with her diary in hand.

"Yeah we both know that's not going to happen. And we both know why." She winks at me and walks out. If only she knew I've had a dry spell for over a year now.

I prep for my meetings and catch up on some work too. By lunchtime I am done with most of my work. I figure there is little for me to do here so I might as well go home. When I get to the house it's pretty quiet. I guess mum and Hlelo went out for a walk. Perfect, gives me plenty of time to take a nap. I go to my bedroom and lo and behold, Makhosi is sprawled up on my white duvet cover with his dirty overalls. He is going to buy me a new one.

I put my bags away and take off my work clothes. I join him on the bed with just my underwear on. He stirs when he feels the bed moving and opens his

eyes.

"Hey, you're home early." He says wrapping his arm around my waist and pulling me close to him.

"Yeah, I finished early. Why are you here so early. Arent you supposed to be doing deliveries?"

"I was tired so Mthokozisi took over my deliveries."

"Okay, where is my mum?"

"Oh yeah, mum invited her for tea, so she took Hlelo with her."

"Wow, so much free time."

"Yeah, let's take a nap." He closes his eyes getting ready for his nap. But I do not want a nap right now. If I was alone, maybe, but I'm not alone now.

"Yeah, I was thinking of something else." His eyes fly open when he feels my hand cup his dick over the overalls.

"Dont start something you wont be able to finish Miss Majola." He mutters with his now raspy turned

voice. Men are so easy.

"When have I ever not finished anything?" He props himself up on his one arm and looks down at me.

"Well, I guess we are about to see, wont we?" I smile as he brings his head down and takes my lips in his. My arms go on to his back and I pull him close to me. I untie the overalls. He gets off the bed and takes the overalls off. He gets back on the bed and I pull his tshirt off. "Are you sure you want to do this?" He asks with his breath hitting my face.

I'm a bit nervous. My body has changed, it's no longer what it used to be but he keeps telling me I still look beautiful. Heck I can even walk naked around him now so maybe it's not that bad. I nod my head giving him the go ahead. He unhooked my bra and starts kissing me from my neck down to my boobs. I get a bit nervous when he fondles my one boob. My boobs still have milk in them and I say a silent prayer, hoping the milk doesn't leak. He plants kisses down the crevices of my boobs. My heart

starts beating faster and my breathing becomes uneven as he gets close to heaven.

He stops and pulls the underwear down and throws it on the floor. I lay there with my legs and thighs closed. He gently pushes my knees apart while kissing my legs. I hold my breath when I feel his breath too close to my coochie. I feel his tongue tickle my already swollen nub. I hold on to his head as he buries his face deep in me. He sucks and bites my clit. I arch my back and clasp the duvet as he sticks his tongue inside me.

"Oh God, yes. Oh yes." I scream. I feel his finger go inside me. I hold on to his head again as I feel a wave of pleasure ready to hit. I clasp my legs together on his back bringing him closer to my coochie as an orgasm hits me while he sucks up all my juices. As soon as my body stops spasming I unhook my legs from his back and he comes back up and kisses me.

"I missed you." He whispers between kisses. I open the side table drawer and pull out the sealed box of condoms that's been there for almost eight weeks now. I unseal the box while he rubs himself between my folds.

I tear the condom and roll it down his dick. We stare into each others eyes as he slowly inserts himself inside me. I hold my breath with every inch that that's pushed inside me. He stops when I can feel his dick deep inside me and looks at me.

"I love you." Before I can even reply he starts moving in circles inside me. He starts thrusting slowly and his thrusts get stronger and faster. Thank God my mother and daughter are not here, otherwise they would be traumatized from all my screaming and moaning.

He pulls out and flips me over. I lay on the bed as he enters me from behind. With my stomach on the bed, my ass slightly raised he puts his hand on my neck

and pulls the top half of my body up. I should have been a gymnast honestly. He goes in deep and hard while choking me until I cum all over him. He lets go of my neck and I fall back on the bed trying to catch my breath. He flips me on my side and lays behind me. With my one leg up in the he inserts himself inside me again slowly thrusts in while he breaths into my neck.

I hold on to his hand as his strokes get more deeper and intense. I know he is about to cum as his groans get deeper. He goes in faster and faster until we both reach our peak together, for the first time. He lets go of my leg and we both lay there for a second trying to catch our breath. Yeah I can safely say the cobwebs have been cleaned and the salt has been released.

He gets off the bed after a while and goes to the bathroom. He comes back with a warm towel. I lay on my back while he cleans me up. He smiles and

rubs my clit.

"If you keep doing that mum will find us still on this bed." He stops and looks at me, a little more serious now.

"I've been thinking." I look up at him ready for round two.

"Thinking about what?"

"Marry me." Huh. I sit up and rest my back on the headboard.

"What?"

"Marry me. I love you Tivikele, and as much as we started this relationship on lies and pretense I'd like to think we've grown past that and we've apologized to each other and we've cleaned the slate. So I want to make all this official, I want you to be my wife."

I sit there looking at him, not really sure what to say at this point. It took a while for me to even warm up to the idea of being a mother, am I ready to be a wife.

"Mummy, we are back." Mum shouts from the lounge.

"We didnt lock the door." I get up and grab my gown and walk out of the bedroom meeting mum in the passage. She frowns while staring at me.

"Are you Okay?" She asks. I take Hlelo from her and we walk back to the lounge.

"I'm fine. How did you know I was home?" I sit on the couch and play with my baby.

"I saw your car in the parking lot. Are you sure you're okay? You look a bit flustered."

"Honestly I'm fine. How was tea?"

"Good. We brought you scones." She points to the Tupperware sitting on the counter.

"Thank you. I will make tea later. Let me start on dinner." I hand her Hlelo and head to the kitchen.

"Its 3 in the afternoon, since when do you start dinner this early?"

"Well we can always eat early."

I take the pots out of the cupboard and prepare to cook. I'm not even sure what I'm going to make but whatever it is needs to take the whole day and night so I dont have to think about Makhosi's proposal. I dont know if I'm ready to be anyone's wife.

THE PLAYERS GUIDE

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Unedited

My impromptu weekend visit home has turned into a reunion weekend. Mabutho came down last night and we've been having a good time just catching up. My little brother Mzwandile officially holds a Master's in Business Administration. Yes, our family is smart like that. Although I've concluded that Bahole, Mzwandile and Gcinile are the ones that are scholars at heart. They are the ones who have never taken a gap year or went straight into job hunting after getting their first degree. Mabutho and I were ready to make our own money by the time we graduated.

Speaking of school I've also been toying with the idea of going back to school too. But that idea will

have to wait for now. Hlelo is being tossed around from one person to the next. The only time she is brought to me is for her to milk me. When that is done she is taken away from me. Today dad decided he is in a mood to braai so he ordered a whole lot of meat and we are sitting outside by the pool while he braais. My brothers are busy racing in the pool. I figured this would be a perfect time to talk to him about Makhosi's proposal.

I finish breastfeeding Hlelo and hand her to Gcinile then take the few steps to the braai stand.

"The meat is not ready yet, be patient." He tells me when he notices me next to him. This one thinks he is a braai master.

"That's not why I'm here. I need to talk to you about something."

"What is it?"

"Makhosi asked me to marry him." He stops turning the meat and looks at me. He stares at me for a while before he frowns.

"You don't seem too excited about it?" I pull a chair and sit down.

"I dont know. It came out of the blue. A little warning would have been nice." He chuckles and continues with his meat.

"Isnt your relationship enough of a warning? Besides, you two are practically living together. A piece of paper will just be a formality."

"Formality or not, marriage is a huge step, it's just too big a commitment." He takes the meat off the fire and puts it in a Tupperware bowl before grabbing another chair and sitting next to me.

"Running a business is a huge commitment but you're doing it, raising a child is a lifetime commitment but you're doing it, I'm sure a year ago you would have laughed if anyone had told you that you'll be a mother, but here you are."

"Its not the same Kodwa baba. I can't really throw the baby away." He laughs.

"Exactly. A marriage although is meant to last forever can also be dissolved if it no longer serves its purpose in your life."

"That's what scares me Baba, divorce. I want a marriage like yours, you and mum are the ultimate perfect couple." He shakes his head and takes my hand in his.

"Baby, there is no such thing as a perfect couple. Your mum and I love each other, but love alone will never be enough to make a marriage work. Respect is important, trust is important, liking the other person is important and then there are finances and all that comes with it. Figure that out and you'll have your answer." Not only has he jumped the gun and crossed the river, I'm confused as hell.

"Baba, let's start on step one, I haven't accepted the proposal because i dont trust him with my heart."

"Okay, I understand that. As much as he had made amends and tried to fix what he broke the truth is it will never fully be fixed, and you will never fully trust

him, but sometimes taking risks can bring great rewards. I'm not saying marry him, but take your time and think about it. Don't rush into making a decision. When you feel it in your heart and your soul, then you'll find the answer you really need. Trust me it will come to you." I sigh, will it ever come to me? Will I ever fully trust Makhosi to be honest and truthful with me? If I say yes to this marriage proposal, that's a whole lifetime commitment, but then again we have a child together, married or not we will always be tied to each other. There will always be that bond that will keep us together. But marriage, why is it so hard for me to say yes? Why cant I be like normal girls who scream and cry when they are proposed to.

"How do you do it? Marriage? How do you do it?"

"Well, the easiest answer for me, its choosing your partner every single day. Every day it's about choosing the person you're with, through the good and the bad times. And just so we are clear, bad times do not include cheating or abuse. Those one's

should never be forgivable. One red flag and you leave, dont wait hoping for the red flag to turn into white, it will never happen." Okay then. I guess that's the end of that conversation.

I stand up, give him a hug and join my mom in the kitchen and help her finish up making the salads. When we are done we take them out with the meat to be warmed up on the fire before we dish up.

Everyone gathers around the table and like always we say grace before digging into the food.

"So, Mzwa, what's next? You have your masters now, are you planning on getting your PhD?" Mum asks my brother.

"Eventually. But for now I think I will go back to work and then get my PhD while working, maybe after a year or so." He replies with a piece of wors in his hand. I laugh seeing him like that cause last night he was saying how much he missed meat. Apparently he became vegan when he got to China because he

didn't trust their meat choices. Especially since there's been plenty of rumors of them eating cats and dogs.

"You're a bit overqualified, who is going to hire you?" The pessimist Gcinile asks.

"Well sis, I'll have you know I already have an offer from a company in Joburg. I signed the contract about a week ago."

"So you won't tell us which company?" Dad asks.

"Nope. There will be a press conference to announce my appointment." Trust Mzwandile to keep a simple company name secret. It's not like he will be working for the CIA, but then with Mzwandile you can never know.

Later in the evening we decide to go to a club, just us kids though and the grandparents will just have to babysit. We get to the club and it's already packed. Bahole being the party animal that he is we are let in immediately much to the mumbling of the people standing outside begging to go in. We are led to a table and drinks are ordered.

"Shouldnt we be sitting in the VIP section?" Gcinile asks sipping on her cold drink. Yes, she is drinking cold drink because her brothers think she is fifteen, me, they know not to try that BS with me. Bahole is busy on his phone texting someone.

"People who buy ten thousand rand bottles of alcohol sit in the VIP section. Wena with your cold drink need to chill here with the ordinary folks."

Mabutho says and we all burst out laughing at her. She rolls her eyes and sips her drink. A few minutes later a hostess whispers something in Bahole's ear and then we are led to the VIP section. I told you Bahole was a party animal, who even gets led to a VIP section nje out of the blue.

We get to the VIP section and sit down. More drinks are ordered. I keep checking my phone to see if the parents are still Okay and there is nothing, no message or missed call. I guess they are still Okay. After two glasses of wine I decide I'm good. I order some water and juice to drink for the rest of the night. While waiting for my drinks I decide to go to

the bathroom. I wait in line for about ten minutes before I can go in. When my turn comes I go in and do my business. I wash my hands and walk out. I take a few steps out of the toilet before bumping into someone. I look up and I find Makhosi's friend Ndalo.

"Sorry." I try to walk around him but he blocks my way.

"Tivikele, fancy seeing you here." He says with a smile on his face. Does he think we are friends now?

"Its a club. Its open to the public. Excuse me." I try to walk away but he stops me, again.

"Look I know I'm not one of your favourite people."

"I'm glad you understand that. Now can I leave."

"Listen, this whole thing wasnt meant to be that serious. It was just a joke. We didnt meant for anyone to get hurt." Of course not, I mean how do you toy with someone's heart and still expect them to be Okay afterwards. Men!

"Got it. Can I go now?"

"Sure. Makhosi is here too if you want to see him."

"Thanks." I walk away and head back to my siblings.

I get back to my siblings and find them with one more person in their company. Makhosi is here and he seems to be having the time of his life chatting to Bahole and Makhosi. The way they are laughing you would think they have known each other forever. Mzwandile is just staring at him, the look on his face I'm not familiar with it.

"Hey, what are you doing here?" I stand in front of them since the three of them are now sitting together with Makhosi in the middle.

"Hi hi." He gets up and gives me a hug. He sits back down again. Now I'm stuck looking at them while I'm standing here like Lot's pillar of salt wife.

"What brings you here?"

"Work. We came to check out a club downtown that we want to buy." He tells me.

"Which club is it?" Bahole butts in. Before I know it

they are having a full blown conversation with each other, weighing and outweighing the pros and cons of buying the club. Bahole and Mabutho are giving him ideas on how to get the club at a good price. I figure I'm clearly not needed here so I join Mzwandile and Gcinile.

"Why are they so obsessed with him?" Mzwandile asks still staring at the trio. He has this disgusted look on his face. I guess I still have one brother who hasn't fallen for Makhosi's charms.

"Beats me. Now I'm a third wheel in my own relationship."

"More like a fourth wheel." Gcinile corrects me. She has a point there.

I sit and wait for them to finish their conversation. When they are done Makhosi and I walk out of the club. We get outside and get into his rented car. I turn to look at him.

"Ehat did you do to my brothers?" A smile creeps up on his face and he also turns to look at me.

"I don't know what you mean."

"Really? A few months ago they hated your guts and today y'all are besties. What happened?"

"Dont be jealous." Jealous? Me? Mxm.

"I'm not. I'm just curious."

"Ever heard of girls fighting for the same man and then turn around and be best friends?"

"And you think that's what is happening here?" The creepy smile on his face tells me he believes his little theory.

"Forget that, how's my baby?"

"I'm right in front of you and I'm fine." He laughs.

"I can see that, but I was talking about my other baby."

"She's fine. Being spoilt by her grandparents."

"Good." He pushes the seat back. "Now how about I spoil you."

"What makes you think I want to be spoiled." He unbuckles his belt and pants and out springs his

erect penis.

"Him!" He points to his dick. "He has an antenna, he knows when you're close and he behaves accordingly." I reach out and hold his dick in my hand. It's hard. And strong.

"And this is behaving accordingly?"

"Yep." He moans as I move my hand up and down his erect shaft.

I get on the car seat and kneel on it. I kiss the tip of his dick and he shivers. I swirl my tongue on the tip of his dick before I put it in my mouth. With one hand on the bottom and my mouth on top I move my mouth up and down his hard shaft. I feel his hand on my head grasping my braids. When I hear him groan a little louder than usual I let go of him. I pull my underwear down and straddle him.

"Condoms?" He searches his pockets and the cubbyhole but finds nothing. "I am not having sex without a condom Makhosi."

"I'll pull out." He says rubbing my clit. I feel my body trying to betray me but I'm not ready for another

child. Not now.

"Makhosi!"

"Babe, I promise you, my pull out game is strong."

"Do you know how many pull outs are walking around out there?"

"Babe." He inserts a finger into my hole while kissing my boobs. His fingers thrust into me but as good as they feel, I need something stronger. I push his fingers out and replace them with his hard shaft. I know this is me tempting God, but The Lord is my shepherd.

I move in circles around his dick while he holds tightly to my waist. I start moving up and down on him. He reclines the seat till he is laying down facing the roof of the car. He wraps his arm around my waist and pulls me down before thrusting in and out of me from the bottom. He keeps going harder and harder till I feel my orgasm build up. I feel my walls clench around his dick. He keeps going till his own orgasm builds up. He groans as he reaches his climax. And instead of pulling out like he promised

he spills his seed inside me.

"I told you your pull out game was whack." I get off him and grab the tissues from the backseat and take some. I hand him some and he cleans himself up while I do the same.

"Well it's all your fault. You're hot."

"I'm pretty sure there is a pharmacy open right now. Let's go get the morning after."

"Why? Hlelo needs a playmate." I look at him, with an angry face on and I guess he sees I'm not joking.
"Okay, bad joke."

He brings the seat back up and we drive around looking for an open pharmacy.

"I dont think pharmacies are open right now. Let's just go to the hotel we will get the pills in the morning." He says while we are parked outside the fourth pharmacy.

'Dear God, I know I have no right to ask this of you, especially since I went into this with my eyes wife open, but please, from the bottom of my heart do not

let any of those sperms find my egg. Please hide my poor egg under the shadow of your wings. I will get the pills in the morning and everything will be okay. Amen.'

THE PLAYERS GUIDE

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Unedited

"Maka pull out, vuka. We have to go."

Remind me again what drugs I was high on when I fell in love with this idiot. He is standing above me on the bed looking at me with a smirk on his face.

"What time is it?" He looks at his watch and sits down on the bed.

"Almost eight o'clock. I'm sure there is a pharmacy open somewhere. Go take a shower then we can have breakfast before I take you home."

"Where is my phone?" He grabs the phone from the side table and hands it to me. I open it expecting to find a thousand missed calls from my parents and siblings but there is none. Just a message from mum telling me she is going to church and she is taking Hlelo with her. Talk about being completely

replaced.

"Oh we can always have breakfast in bed and hope to God my swimmers are weak as fuck." Yeah that ain't happening. I jump off the bed and leave him laughing. I get into the bathroom and take a quick shower. I get out and find him laying on the bed playing with his phone. I am not wearing last nights dress so he will have to borrow me his stuff.

"I need clothes." He takes off his eyes from the phone and looks at me.

"I didnt bring any dresses." Mxm. I open the closet and search through it. I find some sweatpants, they will have to do. I find a tshirt and I'm good to go.

I get dressed and put on my heels. He looks at me from head to toe. I can see him salivating. I wonder why.

"What do you think?" I ask him. He sits up and motions with his hand for me to come close. I walk closer to him and stand between his open thighs. He places his hands around my waist and turns me around.

"Why do my clothes look better on you?"

"Stop being greedy, let's go get the pills."

"Just one small nyana round nje wouldnt kill anyone." I look around the room and find the empty condom box. I show it to him.

"See that empty box, it's why we have to go, now."

"I'll just put in the tip. Small small."

"The tip is the reason why most high school girls got to be teen moms. Let's go." I free myself from his hold and walk away. "Let's go baba." He sighs and gets the car keys.

We get to the pharmacy and he parks the car.

"Do you want to come in or I can get the pills for you?"

"Nope, I'm coming with." I open the car door and get out leaving him laughing.

"You dont trust me?" He asks when he catches up with me and wraps his arm around my neck and kisses me on the cheek.

"Nope. I'm pretty sure if it were up to you I would be carrying twins by now."

"That is true." We get to the counter and ask for the pills. The guy walks away to find the pills. I see some cute pacifiers so I leave Makhosi and go look at them.

When I go back I find him talking to another pharmacist, this time a girl, I've never seen a person have that wide of a smile. I'm not sure if Makhosi has lost his touch or he is choosing to ignore the poor girl. I'm pretty sure her flirt radar is on a hundred, but brothers is being as professional as he can be. It's quite funny actually. I figure I should rescue him so I walk up to him and hook my one arm on his.

"Is he still not back yet." I ask looking up at him with my eyelashes batting more than usual.

"Not yet. I wonder what's the hold up."

"Seriously he needs to hurry up. I can't afford to be pregnant right now and we both know you have super sperms." His faces creases and he looks at

me like I'm crazy. I ignore his look and turn to the girl with a huge smile on my face. Her smile disappears the same way it appeared and she walks away. I chuckle as the other pharmacist brings the pills. We get a bottle of water and pay for everything then walk back to the car.

"What was that about?" He asks as soon as we are in the car. I take the pills and gulp them down.

"What?"

"That whole super sperm comment."

"Did you seriously not notice that the girl was flirting with you or you're just acting." He chuckles.

"So you were jealous?" Trust him to turn this whole thing around and make it about me.

"You know what, forget it. Let's just go home." He laughs and starts the car.

"You're so cute when you're jealous."

"Can we just go?"

"Arent we getting breakfast?"

"There's breakfast at home." He frowns and turns to look at me.

"Really?"

"Yes really." He shakes his head and drives.

When we pull up to the house we find only my brothers home. Mzwandile is sitting outside by the front door.

"Your brother doesn't like me very much does he?" Makhosi asks me as soon as the car is parked.

"What do you mean?"

"Look at how he is looking at me right now." I look at my brother and sure enough he is throwing daggers at the car with his eyes. I'm pretty sure if he could, he'd throw a few punches Makhosi's way.

"Dont worry about it, he is just being overprotective. Let's go. I'll make you breakfast." We get out of the car and walk towards the fire breathing dragon sitting by the front door.

"Hey you." I bend down to give him a hug.

"Bafo." Makhosi says behind me. Mzwandile keeps quiet, instead he looks at Makhosi with his jaws clenched ready for a fight. I really need to talk to him about his little attitude.

"Ubafo wakho ufana nami? (Your brother looks like me?)" He answers shocking even me.

"Hhaybo Mzwandile, what's your problem?" He keeps quiet but his eyes are still glued on Makhosi. I'm not in the mood for his attitude right now. I know my parents are in church with Hlelo and Gcinile and to avoid a fight I pull Makhosi into the house.

We find Bahole and Mabutho in the lounge watching last nights repeat of the soccer match. Makhosi joins them and as soon as he sits down there is noise in the lounge. Atleast some people dont hate him, anymore. I go to the kitchen and make him a full English breakfast.

"And he gets treated like a king!" Mzwandile says with a frown on his face while standing by the entrance to the kitchen. I put the cup of coffee on the tray and go to lounge and hand Makhosi his food.

I go back to the kitchen to talk to my brother.

"Come with me." I tell him. He follows me to my room. I close the door and sit down on the bed.

"What's your problem?"

"I should be asking you that. What's with all this VIP treatment he is getting? Have you forgotten what he did to you?" I sigh and close my eyes. I open them again and look at him. I pat the bed next to me and he comes and sits down.

"Bhuti wami, I havent forgotten anything."

"Then what is happening? Everyone seems to treat him like he is suddenly a saint. Do you all have short term memory loss or something? You know even the parents didnt throw a tantrum when we told them you left with him last night. What is really happening here?"

"Makhosi is not a saint. And no I havent forgotten what he did, but we have a child together, even if we didnt, holding on to that much anger and hatred would not be good for me."

"So we roll out the red carpet and hope to God he

doesn't go back to his little stunts. Why am I the only one who is not impressed by his sudden saint hood." That word again. I sigh and turn to him. I take his hand and hold it between my own.

"Mzwandile, A year ago I was pretty sure I would never forgive him for what he did or even stand the sight of him, but he is trying, he really is. I'm not saying I trust him fully but that's just logic speaking, my heart has a mind of its own, and I can't hold on to the anger, everyone here has seen him try his best to make up for his mistakes. He is really trying Mzwandile, you don't have to like him or even hang out with him but please give him a chance, get to know him and you'll realise he is not a monster." He doesn't reply. Instead he focuses on the wall in front of him with his jaws clenched. "Ngyakucela, just give him a chance and you'll see he is not that bad. Don't do it for me, do it for your little marshmallow, imagine her favourite uncle and her daddy not getting along, it would break her little fragile heart." His lips curl into a smile. When all else fails emotional blackmail works.

"Fine. I'll give him a chance. But unlike all of you I'm not impressed by his skinny little cows. And I'm only doing it for Hlelo's sake." I wrap my arms around his shoulders and give him a kiss on the cheek.

"Of course you are, either way. Thank you. Come on, let's go started on lunch before the parents come back." We get up and head to the kitchen.

"Just so we are clear, I still dont like him. I'll tolerate him but I...."

"I know I know, you dont like him." I say cutting him off. Soon he will be joining them in their little bromance. It's only a matter of time.

By the time the parents come back from church lunch is ready and waiting for them. Mzwandile is still acting like the overprotective brother that he is, or rather trying to be. He seems to completely forget that I'm older than him therefore I'm the one who

should be doing the protecting.

Our lunch is loud and filled with laughter and joy. Its crazy how easily Makhosi fits in. It's like he has always been a part of our family. I dont know if my parents see him as a son in law or just their granddaughters father, or even both. Either way it's nice to see that should I decide to marry him, my family would be on board, except Mzwandile but he will come around eventually.

After lunch I pack our things and get us ready for our trip back home. My dad walks into my room while I'm packing the last bag. He sits on the bed and picks up one of Hlelo's stuffed toys.

"I have a suggestion, how about this, you leave Hlelo here and then you can focus on your business and growing it." Nice try. "Or better yet, move the company to Durban then we can see Hlelo anytime we want." I sit down next to him and lay my head on his shoulder.

"You do know Joburg is less than three hours away on a flight. You can fly up anytime you want and stay

as much as you want. Plus we will come down as much as possible." He sighs.

"Well it was worth a try. Still undecided about the proposal?"

"Yep. I'm just grateful that Makhosi is not trying to push me for an answer."

"Good. Whichever decision you take we will support you. I know how your relationship started wasn't really that ideal but even I can't deny that he is trying his best."

"I know. Maybe you should try telling Mzwandile that." He chuckles.

"He's just being a brother. He will come around. If Bahole can sit in the same room with Makhosi and not punch him in the face then Mzwandile will come around too. Don't worry about it. Hurry up, you have a long road ahead of you and I don't want Hlelo being driven in the dark." Of course Hlelo is more important. I swear she is going to be a spoilt little Princess.

I finish packing and get the bags out to the car. We

say our goodbyes and mum lets us go after promising you be back as soon as possible. That's if she doesn't come to Joburg in the next week or so. We pass by the hotel and Makhosi checks out and gets his bags. We head to the airport.

Just after take off I notice someone sitting on the row we are on a woman who keeps poking her head out and looking at us. She's sitting by the window seat, Makhosi and I are on the middle section with Hlelo sitting between us. The woman keeps staring at us and then sitting back again. Honestly it's making me uncomfortable.

"There is a woman on the next seat who keeps staring at us." I tell Makhosi. He pokes his head out and looks at the direction of the woman then sits back again. "Do you know her?"

"Yeah. She's my ex girlfriend." Of course she is. That explains a lot. I don't want to hear anymore so I just ignore her stares and pretend like she's not even there.

When we land at the airport I take Hlelo out of the

airport while Makhosi gets our bags. I'm not even sure how we are getting home so I get outside and wait with Hlelo in the fresh air.

"Cute baby." I hear someone say behind me. I turn and find the ex standing there.

"Thanks. She takes after her dad." Okay maybe she doesn't but I seem to get a kick out of antagonizing these women. She chuckles and takes a few steps closer to me.

"Of course. Her daddy is a handsome man."

"I know right. I don't know what I did to deserve him but Heaven really blessed me." I tell her, a smile plastered on my face.

"Maybe we should stop giving heaven credit when we all know a man like Makhosi doesn't just go around sleeping without protection. So what did you do? Poke the condom? drug him? What?"

"Oh honey. I didn't need to poke any condom. In fact if anyone was most likely to poke a condom it would be him. It's a pity he didn't do it with you."

"Listen, a baby...."

"No you listen." I'm seriously getting tired of these exes popping out of the woodworks and thinking they know everything there is to know about Makhosi. "I dont know what happened between you and Makhosi and quite frankly I dont care. So please stay in your lane. You're not the first ex to be touched about him moving on with his life and you probably wont be the last. But please, if you have an issue please take it up with your ex and leave me out of it. Deal with your man babygirl and let me live my life, okay? Thank you." A car hoots, I turn to look at it and see Makhosi inside. I walk towards the car. He gets out and takes Hlelo from me the straps her into her seat. I get in the passenger side and wait for him.

"You left your car in the parking lot?" I ask him when he gets in.

"Yeah. I didnt want to struggle when I got back." He starts the car and drives away leaving the ex standing there watching us.

"So your girlfriend thinks I trapped you with a baby."

"You and I both know the truth so it doesn't matter what she thinks."

"Just out of curiosity, how many exes will I have to deal with?"

"None. Don't worry about Precious, I'll deal with her."

"Don't do anything stupid. I don't really care about your exes. As long as they stay in their lane I'll stay in mine."

We get home and he unloads the bags while I get the baby upstairs. Once the bags are in he says he has to go somewhere, he'll be back. No guesses as to where he is going. I give Hlelo a bath and then put her to sleep. I then take a quick shower and get my pyjamas on. I make some popcorn and sit in front of the TV. He comes back after about an hour and a half with some Tupperware containers. He puts them on the counter and joins me on the couch.

"So what did Precious say?" He chuckles and lays his head on my lap.

"Dont worry about her, she won't bother you ever again. Oh and I went home and mum wouldn't let me leave without some food. So if you are hungry there is food."

"Thank you. Are you hungry?" I ask him. He turns his head with the most mischievous smile on and stares up at me.

"I am hungry. But not for food." Hhay mzalwane. At the rate he is going I'll be pregnant before we even get married.

"I'm on my period."

"I'll pretend like I believe you. Let me go take a shower." He gets off of me and leaves his phone on the coffee table.

While he is in the shower his phone rings. I look at it and Precious name flashes on the screen. I'm tempted to answer the phone but the last time I went through his phone I found a whole entire arsenal that tore my heart into a thousand pieces. The phone stops ringing and then starts again. I figure there is a difference between going through

his phone and answering a call. Right? Yeah there is a huge difference. I take the phone and answer it.

"Geez, what took you so long?" She asks before I can even say anything. "I take it your anger has died down now we can talk?"

"He is kind of busy at the moment. Can I take a message?" I hear footsteps behind me.

"Why the fuck are you answering his phone?" She screams over the phone.

"Babe, Precious wants to know why I'm answering your phone?" I ask Makhosi as he sits down and lays his head on my lap again. He takes the phone and puts it on speaker.

"Precious. Do I need to get a restraining order?"

"Can we talk. Like properly talk not the tantrum you threw here just now?"

"No need. I said what I needed to say so please respect my decision. Stay in your lane and I'll stay in mine. I'll block you now and as for your orders you'll speak to Zama to set all those up. Goodbye." He

hangs up and takes a handful of popcorn and throws it in his mouth.

"So you're that good huh?"

"Good at what?" He looks at me, a smirk on his lips.

"Never mind. Let's watch the movie." He laughs. I could get used to this, even though he comes with a whole baggage of crazy exes but he is here now, and ready to give us the life we deserve. Maybe marriage wont be that bad.

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"I just realised something."

"What?"

"I've never given you money for child support." I stop brushing my teeth and stare at him through the large mirror in the bathroom. He is standing there, the toothbrush still stuck in his open mouth as if he just discovered the cure for cancer. I shake my head and continue brushing my teeth. "No like seriously, what kind of father doesn't pay child support?" I rinse my mouth and head back to the bedroom. I have to be at work in an hour and I dont have time to massage his ego right now.

He follows me to the bedroom, I turn to look at him and he genuinely looks worried and confused even.

"I should transfer some money to you. How much would be six months back pay?" Jesus Christ of Gqeberha.

"Really Makhosi?"

"Yes really. How much?" I take a few steps and close the gap between us. I put my hands on his chest and his heart us beating out of control. What kind of mess is this?

"Makhosi Zacharia Khuzwayo, can you please stop worrying, it's not like you haven't bought stuff for Hlelo or paid the bill's for the house. Plus I have your card and I do put it to good use."

"Firstly my name is Makhosi Khuzwayo, I dont know who Zacharia is. Secondly I dont think buying five thousand rand shoes counts as child support." He answers with a relaxed look replacing the panic and worry.

"Trust me it does. It's an investment. One day when she is older she will use those shoes. So stop worrying." I let go of him and start getting dressed.

"Speaking of money, I want to buy a house."

"Okay. What kind of house do you want?"

"I don't know yet. All I know is that it needs to have a huge yard or garden for Hlelo to run around in. And my dad sent me all the papers for the trust he created for the office building. With all the rent I've been paying and the other offices' rent there is enough money there to buy the house cash so i need to start looking."

"Okay then. Tell me when you find the house and I'll transfer the money to you." He tells me. Did he not hear me just say I have enough money to buy the house myself?

"You did hear me say I have the money to buy the house right?" He stops getting dressed and looks at me.

"I love you and I love your family but i am not staying kwaMajola. I will not be a sbali Makoti. Not today,

not ever." Men and their inflated egos. It's just four walls with a roof over them.

"Its just a house Makhosi its not that big a deal." He walks to me and cups my face in his hands.

"Lalela ke Miss Independent, if you want to buy a house, buy it, but when we get married we are going to stay in a house that I either built or bought for us as inhloko yomndeni wakwa Khuzwayo." We are living in the 21st century but his head is still stuck in the 18th century. If he thinks I wont buy that house then he has another thing coming. This is not the time for an argument so I'll pretend like I'm on board with his 1950s mentality. I nod my head and he smiles.

I get to work and my friends are all in my office.

"Who died?" I ask when I get in. They all turn to look at me.

"Put your laptop down and lets go." Simz says. Thobi gets up and takes the laptop bag from my hand and puts it down on the desk. I hold on to my handbag as I'm dragged out of there.

"Where are we going?" No one answers me, instead they drag me straight to my car.

"Keys?" Thobi holds her hand out and I hand her the keys. She opens the backseat for me and I get in. Her and Simz take the front seats with her on the drivers side.

"Is anyone going to tell me what's going on?" Simz fixes the rearview mirror and looks at me through it.

"Well we are tired of asking you to make time for us so we are taking it."

"You do know I have work right?"

"Meetings have been rescheduled so your morning is free." Well good thing I didn't have any major meetings with clients.

"Okay then so where are we going?"

"You'll see."

We pull up to a restaurant on Bath Avenue in Rosebank. She parks the car and we go in.

"Booking for Miss Majola." She tells the waitress. She smiles and leads us to a table. We sit down and she hands us the menus.

"We'll have three mimosas please." Thobile orders. The waitress takes our order and leaves.

"So, what's up." I ask them. They look at each other before looking back at me.

"We should be asking you that. We havent seen you or spoke in a while. What's going on?" Simz says.

"I have neglected you haven't I?"

"Yes you have." Thobi answers with her arms crossed on her chest. Trust her to be dramatic.

"Okay, I'm sorry. I've just had a lot going on."

"And that's why you have friends, to offload and help you deal with whatever is going on." Simz tells me.

She's the more stable one.

"Exactly. We are your friends, you can't just give us glimpses into your life like we are strangers. You'll have to file for divorce first before we just disappear into thin air." I'm not sure how divorce made it's way into this.

"Okay, no need for the dramatics, I'm really sorry I haven't talked to you. But I promise you there is no sinister motive behind my distance. Hlelo has been a bit of handful."

"And that's why you need us. Besides, Hlelo needs a god sister or brother, and we didn't even get to have the baby shower. But that's okay, we will have one soon." Simz tells me and then takes a sip of her water. Her mimosa is still sitting there untouched, meanwhile mine is halfway through and so is Thobi's. Is she trying to tell me something?

"There is absolutely no need for a baby shower. Hlelo is old already." I tell her. She sips her drink and that's all the confirmation I need that the baby

shower is not for me.

"Oh no honey, the baby shower is for her." Thobi says pointing at Simz. I knew it.

I scream and get off the chair, good thing the place is not that packed, otherwise everyone would be staring at us. I give her a hug.

"Oh my God, yes. I'm so happy for you." I let go of her and sit back down. "How far along are you?"

"Three months. I only found out a week ago." Oh this is exciting. I cant believe our lives took a sharp turn and went the opposite direction of where we wanted them to go. Simz said she'd have kids when she turns 32, lo and behold she just turned thirty and now has a baby on the way. I guess it's true what they say, when we make plans, God laughs.

"Are you excited?" I ask her. She seems more anxious than excited. But the again I was in the same boat not too long ago.

"I don't know. Scared definitely. I think the excitement is still coming. Am I a bad mother already?" I take her hand across the table and hold it.

"No you're not. You were there when I found out I was pregnant, it's scary but once you hold that little human in your arms, it's like the world doesn't exist anymore. It changes your entire world. Just allow yourself to feel what you feel now and everything will be fine. I promise you."

When we are done with our breakfast turned brunch we walk out of the restaurant after I've paid the bill. Yes, I'm being punished for neglecting my friends. When we get to the parking lot three of my car tyres have been slashed.

"What the fuck?" Simz says looking at the tyres. I take a deep breath and try to calm myself down. And whoever did this was smart enough to slash three instead of all four because they know the insurance won't pay out if just three are slashed so I have no choice but to fork out the money from my own

pocket.

"Who did this?" Thobi asks. If only I knew. As calm as I feel though deep inside I am fuming. "I'm calling the police." Thobi says taking out her phone. I look around the parking lot and see a few cameras. Perfect. I just hope they were working when all this went down.

"While you do that, I'm going to ask if i can see the security footage." I tell them.

"I'll come with you." Simz says and follows me back inside the restaurant.

"Maam, did you forget something?" Our waitress asks as soon as we walk back in.

"No, can I speak to your manager." Her smile turns to panic and I realise she probably thinks she did something wrong. "Relax, it's not about you, someone slashed my tyres, I just need to know if i can see the security footage from earlier." She

relaxes a bit but I can see she is still apprehensive.

"Okay, I'll call her." She leaves us standing there.

"Who do you think did this?" Simz asks me.

"I don't know. But once I know who it is then I might have an idea of who it is."

"Do you think it might be Wale?" That thought has crossed my mind but he is in jail, and he is not powerful enough to still be able to wield some power on the outside. Whoever did this probably followed us here.

"I doubt it. Wale is not stupid enough to add to the charges he already has."

"Ladies, how can I help you?" A white woman says standing next to us.

"We would like to see your security footage for the parking lot. Someone just slashed my tyres and I need to know who did it." She puts on that fake smile that most white people put on when they are about to be condescending and rude.

"I'm sorry about the unfortunate incident but we cannot allow anyone to just have access to our security without the proper paperwork." And here I was thinking humanity would prevail, but I guess not.

"Well it was worth a try. We will just wait for the police to come, I'm sure they would love to question your customers. Who knows, maybe one of them did this or better yet maybe it's one of your staff." Shock masks her face like the snow white foundation on her face.

"You wouldn't dare. My customers have nothing to do with you, heck, these are high profile people."

"We know." Simz tells her. "Now imagine the inconvenience they will be subjected to when news breaks that Minister Mkhwanazi was questioned in your restaurant over slashed tyres." She says pointing towards a secluded table where Minister Mkhwanazi is having brunch with some scantily dressed woman, no guesses who she is in his life.

"And imagine when those same high profile realize

your place offers zero security." I add. Her snow white foundation just turned red from all the anger boiling up inside her.

"Fine." She says between clenched teeth. "But keep those police away from my customers. Come with me." She turns and walks away. Yes maybe threatening her was a bit over the top but it got the job done. She leads us down a small passage that leads to a few doors. There is the kitchen on the right side and as you go further down there is an office and at the end of the passage lies a door with the words 'security' on them. She knocks and walks in. We follow her and find two security guards manning the monitors. I wonder how they missed the whole slashing of tyres when the cameras clearly seem to be working.

"Gentlemen, I need to view the security footage f the parking lot from earlier." She tells the men. I notice that the other one has shades and earphones on and

he is sleeping. The other guy immediately searches for the footage and he plays it. "See anything?" The woman asks. We watch the footage that's on fast forward until I see someone approaching my car.

"Stop." He stops the footage and plays it at a normal speed. I see the woman approach my car and then take something out of her bag. She goes around the car and sticks whatever object she has on her on my tyres. She gets to the last tyre and stops, probably contemplating if she should slash that one too. She decides against it and walks away. Unfortunately for her in her stupid Victory walk she looks up at something which makes the camera catch her face. The guard pauses the footage.

"Do you know her?" Simz asks. Unfortunately for me I do.

"Yes. Thank you for your time. The police will be in touch for the footage. Let's go." I walk out with Simz behind me. We get outside and find the police already there looking around and taking a statement

from Thobi. I take my phone and dial Makhosi's number.

"Maka pullout." He says soon as he answers the phone. I know this is an inside joke and any other time it would be funny but not right now. I'm not laughing.

"What's Precious' surname?"

"Precious who?"

"Your crazy ex. What's her surname?"

"Mashaba. Whats this about?"

"She just slashed my car tyres. I'm opening a case."

"Where are you?" He asks and from the way he is breathing, it seems he is running or walking fast. I tell him where we are and he says he is on his way.

"You're the owner of the car right?" The officer asks me after I hang up the phone.

"Yes. It's my car."

"Do you know anyone who would do this?"

"Yes. Her name is Precious Mashaba."

"Oh, how do you know it's her?"

"We just saw the security footage." Simz tells him.

"There's security footage? Perfect. This will be an easy case." He calls his partner and they go into the restaurant. A few minutes later they come out with a flash drive, which I'm guessing is the security footage.

Makhosi shows up just as the police are wrapping up their statements. He parks the car and quickly runs to me and gives me a hug.

"Are you Okay?" He asks.

"I'm good. But your girlfriend just ruined my day and she's going to pay for it. She's going to jail."

"I know. I'm just glad you're okay. I'm sorry." My day just went from a hundred to zero. Whatever happens she's going to pay for this and I'll make sure of it. I was fine with her being a crazy ex being crazy far

away from me, but now her little stunt will not be tolerated. "I'll call a tow truck to come get the car."

He makes the call while we all get into his car. He finishes up with the police and then gets into the car and drives off. We drop Thobi at her office before dropping Simz. He then drives me home. I still need to be at work but he clearly doesn't care about that and I'm in no mood to get into it with him. We get home and free the nanny since it's clear I am not going back to work. He makes a few phone calls before joining Hlelo and I on the floor.

"What was that about?"

"Just making sure Precious never comes anywhere near you again. She's been picked up by the cops. And she won't be getting bail." I don't even know how that will happen but I'm glad it will.

"On a serious note though, what do you do to these girls? What do you give them that drives them nuts?" He smirks and gets off the floor. He picks Hlelo up

and takes her to her room. He comes back and stands over me while I lay on the floor.

"To answer your question, let me demonstrate." He unbuttons my pants and pulls them down. He comes back up and pulls down my underwear. He parts my legs and buries his head deep inside my coochie. He sucks and bites and laps up my juices till I cum all over his face. He lifts his head up and looks at me with a satisfied grin on his face.

"Now do you understand?" He asks with his fingers still deep inside me.

"Nope, try harder." He smiles and goes back to doing his job. Yeah it will take more than slashed tyres to ruin my day.

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Bail granted but the protection order still stands. I'm not sure how the justice system in this country works cause stalking should be punishable by twenty years in jail. Well if I was president of the country I'd set tougher sentences for these kinds of crimes. Okay maybe slashing tyres is not a death sentence crime but for my family i would do whatever it takes. But for now i need to trust that Precious is smart enough to follow the rules from now on.

I leave the court house after Precious' hearing, now I'm glad Tivikele wasnt here to hear all the bullshit that her lawyer was spewing. I mean how does a person slash someone's tyres and then turn around be portrayed as a saint who was provoked? I swear if we had a jury in this country she would be in jail by

now.

I drive to the club for a late lunch after the court appearance. The club is closed but the staff is prepping for the opening later, the kitchen staff is already making some food for tonight, mostly the traditional staff. I make an order for a salad to have with the wings I bought along the way as soon as I walk in then proceed up to the office. Ndalo walks in immediately after I sit down.

"Hey man, how did the hearing go?" He takes a seat opposite me.

"Where did you come from." He chuckles and takes a sip of the juice in his hand.

"I was actually having drinks with a business associate. So, how did it go?"

"The club is not even opened yet."

"The perks of knowing the owner. So, how did it go."

"Well, she was granted ten thousand rands bail."

"That's messy. Hopefully that's enough of a lesson for her to stay away from Tee."

"I hope so. But knowing Precious, she might just use this as fuel to enact more revenge."

"For her sake, let's hope not. Anyways, Lubanzi is having his birthday braai tonight, you still haven't responded if you're coming or not." The waiter comes in with my lunch and leaves it on the desk and walks out again.

"I'll be there. As soon as I put Hlelo to bed I'll drive to his place. What time is the braai anyway?"

"Around eight. It's quite weird seeing you as a family man." I laugh and take a sip of my drink. Well it's quite weird to me too but like they say, once you get a hang of it, it's hard to let it go.

"You call it weird I call it parenting." We click our glasses and eat the food.

Tivikele needs to be told that her business won't fall apart just because she has to leave an hour earlier

than most people. I've been sitting in her office for the past hour trying to convince her to leave but she is way too stubborn for her own good.

"Tivikele, seriously, one hour wont kill you." She sighs and looks up from her laptop.

"I cant afford to take any more time off Makhosi. Do you know how much time I've taken ever since I've been back? It's not good for company morale and I havent even got a new client since I got back. I need to work." This will be hard than i thought.

"You've been back for less than two months, you cant possibly expect to just get on the swing of things just like that. And besides you have clients. Yes you want more but right now you can focus on the ones you have."

"Like you said, I want more clients. And i need to set a good example for the staff. I should be the first one in and the last one out. That's how it works." Unless I take matters into my own hands we'll be sitting here for the next three hours going back and forth about this.

I get off the chair and go around her desk. I take her laptop bag and close the laptop in front of her and put it away.

"Makhosi!" I take the laptop and put it in its bag and get her handbag from the hanger and walk out with her shouting my name.

"You'll find me in the car." I shout back.

I walk to the car and five minutes later she gets in too.

"Really?" She says while strapping herself in.

"What? You believe actions more than words mosi." She clicks her tongue and crosses her arms looking out the window. Yeah well she'll get over it. This can't wait.

I miss the turn to the apartment and head towards Hyde Park in Sandton. Of course the daggers she keeps throwing at me with her eyes are enough to make me laugh honestly, but I have to keep myself in check. I pull up to a house with a for sale sign outside. It's perfectly manicured lawns on the outside look like they've never felt a foot on top of

them. The high grey walls are lit up with tiny led lights. The huge brass gates open up a few minutes after sending a text to the agent who is inside. I drive in and the inside is just as amazing, the pictures I viewed on the Agency's website did not do this place justice.

The huge cream glass walls are held up by steel beams. There is a huge and bright hanging Crystal chandelier right in the foyer of the house.

"I hate it." And she speaks.

"You havent even seen the inside of it." I remind her.

"I dont need to. It's too open, I'm all for natural light streaming in but I dont want a glass house. What if someone throws a stone and the place comes tumbling down?" I really tried to hold my laugh but I just couldnt. For a smart woman this woman can be crazy.

"Okay fine, humor me. Check it out and if you dont like it I won't put it an offer." Her answer is her unbuckling the seat belt.

"This won't change my mind. I hate the house." She

opens the car door and gets out. I get out too and we walk towards the smiling agent. It's a pity the madam has spoken and the poor lady won't be getting her commission from us.

"Mr and Mrs Khuzwayo, it's nice to finally put a face to the name." She says with her perfectly manicured hands held out for a handshake. I shake her hand and she proceeds to shake Tivikele's hand. Tivikele is really not into this, even her smile is fake.

"This place is beautiful in person." I tell the smiling agent.

"Thank you. Let me show you the inside, it's too die for." She leads us into the house and the tour begins.

Yeah, Tivikele is not feeling this house at all. We walk back down to the kitchen from the bedrooms. She makes a yawn sign behind the agent who is still going on and on about the house.

"I'm sorry, I have a question." Tivikele speaks for the first time since we got in here. "How much is this house?"

"Oh its sixteen million, although it's been on the

market for a while now so we can get the price down a bit." The agent answers. Tivikele just smiles and disappears to another part of the house. I know shes probably mumbling to herself about something.

We finish our tour and say our goodbyes.

"Sixteen million? Bayanya (they are crazy.)" She says as soon as we drive out of the place. The price is a bit hefty but its doable.

"Did you see the finishes?"

"I dont care if they used gold and diamonds that amount is a bit excessive. We could literally get two nice houses in Naturena or Ruimsig for that amount and still have change left." Okay she has a point there. And here I was thinking she'd actually like it. I guess it's back to the drawing board.

"So Lubanzi invited us for a braai. Wanna come?" I ask her. She rolls her eyes and looks out the window.

"No thank you."

"Look, I know my friends aren't your favourite people, but it would be nice to have you there."

"Even if I wanted to go, who is going to stay with Hlelo, we can't expect MaQwabe to work more overtime. I'm pretty sure she has plans of her own."

"We can take her home."

"The farm is an hour outside Joburg, and you know your mom wont just let us leave without a cup of tea or a plate of food. And then its another hour to drive back here. By the....."

"Okay no need for anymore excuses. I hear you." It was worth a try.

We get home and we release the nanny, I give Hlelo a bath before taking a shower while her mummy feeds her. When I'm done I get ready for Lubanzi's raai. I get Hlelo from Tivikele and head to the nursery. I sit on the rocking chair with her on my lap and a story book on the other. I read her the story and before long she is sleeping. I look at her sleeping face and wonder how I got so lucky. Inspite of the twisted way this relationship began, but this little angel brought us back together again. I know it's wrong to even say this but Hlelo is the reason

Tivikele and I are together. Not in a bad way, in a way that her presence was, as her name suggests, God's plan. I fucked up a once in a lifetime opportunity to be with the love of my life and somehow God saw me worthy of a second chance, and he used this little human to make it all possible. I must be in the list of His favourite people.

"What are you thinking about?" I look up to find Tivikele leaning by the door looking at me intently. I smile and look at my baby again. The little one.

"I'm just thinking how lucky I am to have the two of you in my life. When I count my blessings, I definitely count you twice." I give Helo a kiss on her forehead and carefully put her in her crib.

"Are you dying?" Tee asks me with her brows furrowed and her eyes squinted. I walk to her and wrap my arms around her waist and give her a few kisses all over her face making her giggle. I stop and look at her.

"No, I'm not dying. I promise. I'm just reminding myself to never fuck up this dream that I'm leaving."

"Now I'm really convinced something is wrong with you." I snicker and bring her in for a hug.

"I promise you, nothing is wrong. Besides being lucky to have you, this whole thing with Precious just reminded me that I want to protect you, no matter what." I pull back and stare into her dreamy worried eyes. "I know you're Miss Independent and you can do it all and quite frankly, its admirable, but I still want to be there to shield you and protect you from anything and everything that may cause you harm. I love you Tivikele Majola, one day to be Khuzwayo. You're the best thing that's ever happened to me."

She stands on tippy toes and kisses me. The kiss gets intense way too quick. I lift her up and wrap her legs around my waist. I pin her to the wall while fondling her perfect behind. I can feel makhosana rising to the occasion. Thank God for the jeans I'm wearing otherwise I would be pitching a tent by now.

I move my lips to the crux of her neck and she moans in my ear.

"You'll be late." She whispers.

"Just five minutes." She brings my head up to look at her.

"I don't do quickies at home. Go to your braai." She wiggles herself down and frees herself from my arms and walks back to the lounge with me following behind her like a horny chihuahua.

"Come on. What happened to being spontaneous." She laughs and throws herself on the couch.

"Go to your braai, I'll be here waiting for you, for a proper session not a rushed quickie, cause we both know you're the only one who will enjoy."

"Fine. But when I get back here you better be laying on the bed naked with your legs wide open. I'll call you before I leave Lubanzi's." She lays back on the bed resting on her elbows. She opens her legs wide, pulling up her skirt and revealing a sexy lacy number.

"Like this?" She asks in a soft sexy voice. Yeah the braai can miss me.

"Okay I'm cancelling." I take my phone out of my pocket and she gets off the couch laughing and takes the phone from me. "What are you doing?"

"You're going to the braai."

"No, you can't tease me like that. Lubanzi will understand."

"No he won't. It will be like I am keeping you from them. Go and have fun with your friends bro."

"They won't. They will understand." She pushes me towards the door.

"Maybe, but they will still blame me for keeping you away from them. So please go. Me and my cookie will be right here when you get back." That's not convincing enough for me but I'll let her have this one.

"Fine. But if you're sleeping when I get back you'll be in trouble."

"That's not a problem, you'll wake me up and in the words of Chris Brown, you'll fuck me back to sleep." She says kissing me and then pushing me out the door.

"Really?"

"Have fun!" She shouts through the closed door.

"You're certifiably crazy." I shout back.

"And you love me anyway." She shouts back. I chuckle and leave.

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NARRATED

Alcohol, parties and scantily clad women used to be Makhosi's brand. Wherever he was women were sure to flock there. Many were mostly there hoping for just one night with him and ten thousand would be theirs. In today's society he would most likely be known as a blesser. Or maybe he was a blesser. But not today.

Even though the braai is filled with women dancing all over Lubanzi's place in Naturena, none of them seem to interest Makhosi in anyway. Of course some have tried to get his attention, but they are lucky if they get a smile. Even the corona bottle in

his hand he has been massaging for the past hour is proof enough that he doesn't really want to be here. His mind is in an apartment somewhere in Fourways.

"You know the purpose of being at a braai is to socialise not sip one bottle of beer for three hours." Lubanzi says louder than normal because the music is too loud, bringing Makhosi back to the present. Makhosi laughs and takes a sip of his warm beer while his friends jokingly make fun of him being 'old'.

"Please, he is a family man now, cut him some slack." Tshepo says and the guys erupt in laughter again. Zizo gets up and takes the volume down a notch allowing the friends to not shout over each other.

"Still no answer to your proposal?" Melo asks. Makhosi sighs.

"Nope. We went to see a house today, she hates it."

"Was it the one you found in Hyde park?" Ndalo asks.

"Yeah. She says she hates the glass and it's too expensive."

"Really? The girl who wears five thousand rand shoes thinks a house in Hyde park is expensive?" Ndalo says.

"Yep. She keeps surprising me."

The night goes on and on with more people showing up. By three the same crowd is now starting to disperse. As usual, it's been a rather successful 'get together'. Makhosi and his friends help Lubanzi pick up bottles around the property before they all go their separate ways. They start leaving one by one until Lubanzi, Makhosi and Lubanzi's snack for the night are left. Makhosi finally says his goodbyes and heads out. His car is parked close to the long driveway..

He calls Tivikele but she doesn't pick up. He calls again and she picks up in her sleepy voice.

"I'm on my way home. Remember what we talked about earlier. You better be ready when I get there." Tee chuckles.

"Yes daddy!" Makhosi's lips curl into a smile as he hangs up the phone. He unlocks his car door and

freezes when he feels a cold element touching the back of his neck. He is not one for guns, but he knows a gun. He lifts his hands up to show his assailant he means no harm.

"You can take the keys and the car." He says. The person says nothing. Makhosi turns around to face his assailant. The gun is now pointed to his broad chest. He is surprised but relaxed when he realizes who it is. Even in the faint light from the street pole and the light from the house, that face, he can recognize it from miles away. "What are you doing here? And what the fuck are you doing with that?" Before the assailant can answer a gunshot goes off and hits him in the chest, he holds on to his chest as blood gushes out. As he loses strength and his knees give in another bullet hits him on the shoulder. A he lays on the concrete driveway bleeding on it another bullet hits his abdomen.

Lubanzi comes rushing out to check what's happening. The assailant runs off and gets into a black VW parked outside the gate. Lubanzi tries to chase the car but it's a futile process. He runs back

to find his companion kneeling next to Makhosi with her gown now acting as a bandage to his wounds and a phone nestled between her shoulder and her ear.

"The police and an ambulance are on the way." She tells Lubanzi.

"We can't wait. Let's get him to a hospital." He tells her. They struggle to get him into the back of his car but eventually they get him in. Lubanzi gets in the drivers seat while his companion cradles Makhosi's head on her lap putting pressure on his wounds. He drives off to the hospital while calling his friends to meet him there. In between the calls he keeps praying that Makhosi makes it. As it is he knows Tivikele doesn't like him or his friends, how will he explain Makhosi dying at his braai, yes it was over but still, he would not have been here if it wasn't for his braai. There might be some life left in Makhosi, but the guilt in Lubanzi's heart was more.

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Tivikele is angry, Makhosi didn't show up last night and his phone rings unanswered. To her, the fact that the phone is still ringing means he is held up somewhere. If he had been hijacked the phone would be off by now. But it's not, so he must be fine. She feeds her daughter her breakfast even though her brain is on over drive. Ever since she woke up she's been practicing what she will say to him. She already has her speech down from the moment he walks through the door.

A knock comes through the door which pisses Tivikele even more. If Makhosi lost his keys they are going to have a problem. She leaves Hlelo sitting in her highchair and marches to the door. She pulls the door so fast it almost hits the wall. Shock and fear run over her when she sees Ndalo and Lubanzi standing in her front door.

"Can I help you?" She asks with the burglar standing between them.

"Can we come in." Ndalo speaks, in a thin brittle

voice, tears ready to roam free down his face. Lubanzi hasn't had the courage to even look at her in the eyes. Tivikele sees the worry in his eyes. She gets the key and opens the burglar door allowing them in.

"Makhosi is not here." She tells them.

"We know. That's why we are here." Ndalo answers.

"What's wrong? Where is he? He is not picking up his calls. Is he okay?" Her heart starts beating fast, she is not ready to hear what they have to say but she needs to know where he is.

"Makhosi has been shot. I'm sorry." Ndalo breaks the news. A loud shrieking wail breaks out from Tivikele's throat before she slumps down on the floor.

THE PLAYERS GUIDE

50

Unedited

I was raised by doctors, so I've spent time in hospitals. Sure I spent most of my time in their offices or the nurses stations and sometimes the cafeteria, but the smell of disinfectant, the beeping sounds of machines and the sight of blood don't scare me that easily. Heck, at some point everyone thought I'd be the one to follow in their footsteps. But obviously that didn't happen. But being in a hospital as a visitor, here to see someone you love, everything hits different. The disinfectant makes me want to puke my insides out, the beeping sounds of machines and nurses heels hitting the concrete floors are driving me nuts.

I've been on auto pilot since Ndalo and Lubanzi came to tell me about the shooting. I still have no idea what happened. All I know is that Makhosi has

been in surgery for hours now. Makhosi's friends are all here as well as his family. Before his parents and siblings got here Ndalo and Lubanzi took turns taking care of Hlelo. They seem to be good at it too because Hlelo just sleeps and poops and they've changed her diaper a few times. They played with her and kept her occupied. When the Khuzwayo family showed up they took over taking care of her.

Being in ghost mode is not helping matters for me. My brain keeps imagining the worst case scenarios. And I keep going back to last night. He wanted to stay home but I pushed him to go be with his friends. He was ready to cancel on them but I forced him to go, what if I forced him to his death? I should have just let him stay, I should have given him what he wanted and he would have woken up next to me this morning. He would probably be busy with his deliveries by now and he'd bring me ulusu from Kwamaimai. If he could he would make a detour to the mall and come back with another stuffed toy for Hlelo. This is not how I pictured this day going. Even when I laid in bed stark naked in the middle of the

night waiting for him to come home, not once did I think he would be lying in a hospital bed fighting for his life.

Yes I was angry thinking he's probably holed up with another some woman, but now I'd give anything to make that be true. I'd trade all this for him cheating. I close my eyes and let the tears silently flow. This feels like a dream, it feels like I will wake up and he will be right there making fun of his non existent pull out game. I feel someone's hand on my upper shoulder. I open my eyes and look up, Mrs Khuzwayo smiles at me and holds me in her arms. I sob on her chest, wondering how I will face this woman if Makhosi dies because I forced him to go and hang out with his friends.

"He will be okay nana, don't cry." She whispers to my head. I want to believe her, I really do, but judging by the blood I saw in Lubanzi's car, I have little hope.

"What if he doesn't make it?" I think out loud.

MaKhuzwayo squeezes me harder. What if him being sentimental last night was because he could sense what was to come? What if he could feel it,

that's why he wanted to stay and I said no? How will I explain to Hlelo how her father died?

After what feels like an eternity two doctors walk in. Their faces are hard to read. We all stand up and look at them as if they are about to distribute money to us.

"How is my son?" Mr Khuzwayo asks.

"Well, we have managed to stabilize him. But his condition is still critical." One doctor says.

"Will he be okay though?" Ndalo asks.

"It's hard to tell right now. For the next few hours we will be monitoring him and see how he responds to treatment." The other doctor tells us.

"How severe was the damage?" Zama asks even through her tears. I might not like her very much but she seems like she is hurting.

"Well, One bullet hit him on the shoulder but we were able to remove it. The one on the chest just right above his heart. The one that did the most damage is the one in the abdomen. It hit his liver, luckily we

were able to remove the damaged part. As you know a liver can grow back so we will be monitoring that as well. The bullet also grazed parts of his lung as well as his kidney. There was also a lot of internal bleeding there but we were able to stop the bleeding, if he does wake up he will have to operate on one kidney." The doctor explains and in my head I keep going over the fact that whoever shot him really wasnt trying to scare him, he or she was dead set on killing him. I mean the person didn't even try and take the car or rob him, all his things were there, this was more than a robbery gone wrong, it was a hit. And now I'm wondering who would want him dead? And why?

"Can we see him?" I ask.

"He is in ICU right now so we can only let in one person at a time."

"Then mom can go first." Zama says loud enough for everyone to hear.

"No, Tivikele can go first." Mr Khuzwayo says.

"Its okay baba, uMa can go first." I say. Although I do

want to go in, it's only polite to let the parent go in first. Right?

"Its okay, you can go in." MamKhuzwayo says. You dont have to ask me twice.

I follow the doctor's to the ICU. They lead me to a separate ward where he is. The beeping sounds welcome me in. Its unreal seeing him like this. He is laying there with a bandage going over his shoulder, another one on his chest and probably another around his abdomen. I take a couple of steps forward and stop. It feels like if I hold his hand it will just make this real. But it is real, no matter how hard it may be, it is real and the sooner I stop trying to make this out to be a dream the sooner I can help him recover from this and we can go back to carrying out our plans.

I move forward and pull the lone chair in the room close to him. The beeping sounds of the heart monitor is irritating. I sit down and take his hand in mine. Its warm, almost like he will squeeze his long thin fingers around mine. I bring his hand up and hold it next to my cheek.

"You know if this is your way of getting some attention, it's a bad idea. It's time to wake up now. Hlelo needs you, I need you." A couple of tears run down my cheeks and onto his hand. "We need you, I need you. I dont want to do this life thing without you. Tell you what, if you wake up, I'll marry you, I'll live in that hideous and expensive house, just wake up. Please." I wipe off the tears silently running down my cheeks.

"I dont know if I've said this enough lately but I love you. You promised me forever Mr Khuzwayo, you promised me a lifetime of memories and happiness, you need to be here to fulfill your promises. And you need to be here to raise your daughter, you cant be the first man to break her heart by dying, I know it wont be by choice so I need you to fight, fight for our little family. We need you Makhosi. We need you."

I'm not even sure if he can hear me but I can only hope. After pleading and praying I walk out allowing his mum and dad to come in. I'm not sure how that will work cause they said one person at a time, but they are his parents after all. When I get back to the

waiting area the people have dwindled down a bit. Hlelo is sleeping in her stroller. Makhosi's friends are all gone except for Ndalo. I sit down and drag Hlelo's stroller close to me. I look at my sleeping baby and try to picture our lives without him, I try as hard as I can but I fail, at every turn. I need him to be there for her first birthday, her first day at pre school, her first day at big school, high school, varsity and her graduation. I need him to be there to scare away all the boys who will have a crush on her or break her heart. I need him to be there to walk her down the aisle. I just need him to be there for her like he promised.

"Oh baby." I dont know if this is all me but there will always be something soothing about my mothers voice. Hearing her voice just seems to make the world alright again. She engulfs me in her arms, and even though tears are pouring out of my eyes, for the first time since all this began, I can breathe. I'm not sure how to move on from here but for now, I just breathe.

NARRATED

In Midrand, Precious is in a flat with her best friend Amara. An empty bottle of wine sits on the coffee table in front of the girls, Precious gulps down the last of her wine, gets up and goes to the kitchen, she comes back with another opened bottle of wine and places it on the table. She pours herself a glass and takes a sip.

"Drinking isn't going to solve this Precious." Amara says looking at her friend.

"What do you suggest I do? Go to the police and hand myself in?" Precious asks her.

"For a start. You shot a person, he could be dead!" Amara shouts at her. Precious sits back on the couch and swirls the wine around in the glass looking at it. For someone who just shot and almost killed a person she seems rather unphased about it.

"I'm not doing that Amara." She gulps down the wine

and fills the glass up again.

"He could be dead Precious, dont you care. He has a girlfriend and a child. Don't you care about them?"

"No! I don't. I'm the one who was meant to have his kids, not her. She took him from me, so I took him from her. Simple mathematics." She stands up and stares out the window.

"You are so selfish you know that." Amara tells her.

"You told me you were just going there to talk to him, I drove you there to talk to him and now I could be an accomplice to a murder. You shot the man because you couldnt have him. How does that help you now?" Precious turns around and looks at her friend.

"It doesnt. He dies, we both lose. Oh wait, it does help me, I dont have to watch him play happy families with that self centered bitch anymore. Do you know how smug she looked at the airport when I first saw her? She knew she'd won, and Makhosi was there acting like I didnt exist. He didnt even greet me. And then a few hours later he shows up to my house raving and ranting, promising to make my life a living

hell if he even sees me anywhere near that girl." She chuckles and sips her wine. "He is so overprotective of her. You'd think she's the first girl he has ever been with. Screw me and my feelings. I've been waiting for him for almost five years now. When he was busy playing Joburgs most eligible fuck boy in was there, waiting for him to grow out of that little phase. Instead she swoops in and he falls head over heels in love. She even gives him a child and he turns into this soft mushy family man all of a sudden. You know he even has a ring waiting, I'm guessing to propose to her." She throws herself on the couch again and lays down.

"Precious, how do you know all that? Are you stalking him?"

"You call it stalking I call it research." She chuckles, sits up and pours another glass of wine. "Its all in his bank statements."

"Precious, how do you have access to his bank statements?" Amara asks her, shock written all over her face. She's known about Precious' obsession with Makhosi but she didn't think it would be this

bad. Precious shrugs her shoulders and lays back down again. Amara stands up and picks up her house keys.

"You know what, I'm done with you. If this is how you want to carry on then do it. But I wont be here to help you self destruct. I'm done." Precious quickly stands up and looks at her friend with her hands on her hip.

"And where do you think you're going?"

"I'm not going anywhere. You are. I'm pretty sure by now the police are looking for my car, so it will be better for me if they dont find you here. Because if they do I'll add more crimes my name. Now, please, leave." Precious throws herself back on the couch.

"I'm not going anywhere. Where do you think I will go. You and me are in this together now." She says while sipping her wine, ignoring the bitter deadly look coming from her friend.

Just then a loud knock brings them to a standstill as they stare at the door as if they can see through it who is on the other side. The knock comes again and this time its accompanied by a voice.

"Miss Amara Mkhize, its the police, open the door." The two friends look at each other as panic and fear sets in.

"Do not open the door?" Precious whispers to Amara.

"Stop being stupid, I'm pretty sure they already know we are in here." Amara answers and Precious shushes her. Amara takes a couple of steps towards the door but Precious blocks her way.

"Where are you going? If you're going to open the door tell the cops I'm not here. Or better yet, I'll jump out the window." Amara rolls her eyes.

"We are on the sixth floor stupid. Unless you want to die then you can jump. I'm opening the door."

Precious runs to the bedroom as Amara opens the door. "Officers, what can I do for you?" She asks as the officer in the front tells the others to go in. "Hello, I'm pretty sure you dont have a warrant for you to be barging into my house." She tells them but they ignore her.

The first officer stands in front of her.

"Amara Mkhize, you're under arrest for the

attempted murder of Makhosi Khuzwayo. You have a right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law." At that very moment, Amara's life flashed right in front of her eyes. She didn't see her life turning out this way, after all the hard work she'd put in her law studies, she was about to lose it all, for someone who really didn't seem to care about anyone but herself.

The officer puts the cuffs on her as the others come back from searching the house with Precious screaming her lungs out trying to fight them. They stop before the first officer and he looks at the screaming Precious from head to toe.

"I knew I'd run into you again, I didn't think it'd be for this. Now tell me, why did you shoot the man? He did nothing to you." He asks her. Precious pouts her lips and a creepy smile fills her face.

"Well, it's simple really, if I can't have him, neither can she." At that moment Amara realizes it's one man for themselves. The officer drag Precious away. The first officer turns to look at Amara who has tears running down her face.

"And wena, what's your motivation for doing this?"

"She forced me. She asked me to drive her there because she needed to talk to him about their relationship. I was waiting for her in the car when I heard the gunshots. I got out of the car and a few seconds later she was running to the car with her gun pointed at me. She told me to drive or else she'd shoot me too. I had no choice. Even when we got here, she said she'd kill me if I ever opened my mouth and talked, the gun she used is under the couch. She's been using it to intimidate me. She only put it there after she heard he knock on the door." She narrates with tears running like a waterfall. The officer laughs and looks at her.

"This will be interesting. Let's go." He pushes her out of the flat as the other officers go through every inch of it trying to find evidence. Unbeknownst to Precious, more officers were at her house turning it upside down. Everything she thought she'd hidden was being uncovered and she didn't even know it. The evidence against her was mounting by the second. As far as the officer was concerned, this

was an open and shut case, and with Amara's confession, Precious was set to spend the rest of her life behind bars.

TIVIKELE

My routine lately has been simple, wake up, go to the hospital, got to work, come back to the hospital for lunch, go back to work, come back to the hospital then go home. Wake up tomorrow and repeat the process.

I tried for a while to imagine life without Makhosi, I couldn't, but the past four months have showed me that I don't want to live without him. He has been stuck in a coma for the past four months and my life hasn't been the same since. It feels empty, he is alive, but he is not here, he is just laying in that bed, I'm not even sure anymore if he is fighting for his life or what. But maybe the fact that he is alive means he is fighting.

As usual, I leave work and drive to the hospital. I

greet the nurse at the reception and I dont miss the smile masking the pity in her eyes. I'm sure she think I'm nuts or I'm too hopeful. But I refuse to believe anything the doctors say, Makhosi will wake up, and if he doesnt, he will die because he has given up. Not because I have given up. One of us has to have a bit more faith.

I get to his room and pull up the chair and sit next to him, I find a fresh bouquet of flowers and I know his parents were here. They haven't given up hope either which makes things easier on me, because I'd hate to fight them to keep him alive, because I know I would fight them. As I always do, I give him a kiss on his forehead, thanks to the oxygen mask stuck on his face, his lips will have to wait. I take some lip balm from my bag and lift the oxygen mask a little bit, I run the balm on his lips until I see that they are moist. I put the mask back in its place and take his hand and place it on my five month old baby bump. What I've also learnt over the past four months is that my womb is too fertile for it's own good. One night without a condom and all of a sudden I am

pregnant. Again!

As if pull out can feel his dad's hand he starts to move. A tear rhna down my face at the realization that if things continue the way they are right now, he might miss out on another pregnancy. Guilt knocks like a police officer when I remember I denied him the opportunity with Hlelo, and now Precious has denied him the opportunity, again. With his hand still held firmly on my tummy I look at the man I love, his hair has grown, it's no longer the brush cut he prefers, he has lost a bit of weight and his skin is darker than normal, it's crazy how things can change in a blink of an eye.

"You know, Hlelo is standing on her own now, she can only walk if she holds on to the couch but she's still afraid to do it on her own, maybe if you were here to hold her hand she would be a little less afraid. Its been too long Khuzwayo, your baby needs you, I need you and pull out needs you. You said you'd be there for us, please come back, please." I wipe my tears and take a deep breath. I'm not even sure if he can hear me but I still talk to him anyway.

"Still no change?" I look up and find Lubanzi standing by the door. For the longest time I didn't like him or his friends, but the past few months they've been really helpful. They've even paid a few of my bill's, not that I needed it but they were adamant about it, they said Makhosi would do the same thing for them so I just let them be. If this is their own way of dealing with things then I wont deny them. Lubanzi seems to be the one who is more cut up about this, I guess being the last person to see Makhosi and him not being able to get to him before everything happened eats him up inside.

"No." I say and look back at Makhosi. I hear footsteps behind me as Lubanzi walks closer to me. He stands next to me looking at his friend.

"Precious has been sentenced to twenty years behind bars." He tells me. Honestly though, as much as I hate her, she would have gotten away with it if Lubanzi hadn't seen the registration number of the car she drove off in.

"Thanks to you."

"I did what needed to be done. How long have you been here?" I look at my watch.

"An hour maybe."

"Maybe it's time you went home. When last did you eat?" I let out a chuckle, cause in spite of everything, especially my hatred for him and his buddies, they have come through for me. With my family being so far away I've had to lean on them for a lot of things, even Makhosi's family has been amazing, except for that toenail of satan.

"I should go. I dont want to miss Hlelo's bedtime again." I stand up and kiss Makhosi on the forehead.
"I'll see you around."

"Before you leave, the guys and I are taking the kids to the zoo on Saturday, I was hoping we could take Hlelo with us. If you dont mind."

"I'm sure she'd love it. I'll make sure she is ready."
His smile lights up his face. Maybe people are right when they say never judge a book by its cover.

My drive home is long and tiring. Its 30 minutes away but still, it's too far for me right now. I get

home and lucky for me I find Hlelo still up. The moment I get in the door she turns around from the couch, her smile lights up and she walks towards me. She's walking like a penguin but still, my baby is walking, she falls a few times before she gets to me. I pick her up and spin her around and she giggles. She just took her first steps, and her father wasn't here to see it. I get emotional just thinking about it.

After giving her her bath, feeding her and putting her to sleep I take a shower. When I'm done I get into bed stark naked. As sad as this day began, like every other day, it ended on a high. I fall asleep watching videos of us on my laptop and crying myself to sleep, as always.

I'm woken up by the constant buzzing of my phone. The baby monitor is still on and Hlelo is sleeping, but the buzzing continues. I search for my phone under the pillow and its bright light almost blinds me when I take it out. I squint my eyes just to see who it is. I see Sphetho's number before the call gets cut. I notice I have about ten missed calls. I try to call him back but he calls me before I can.

"Sphetho, it's the middle of the night. What's going on?"

"I'm outside your apartment." My heart starts galloping on my chest, hard. I'm not sure what this means, but it might not be good news. Why would he be here at this time. I get off the bed and put on some pyjamas and a gown. I open the door to find Sphetho and Mthokozisi with Philasande, they also look like they were woken up from a deep sleep.

"What's going on?" Although it's a question that needs an answer, I'm not sure I'm ready for the answer. They walk in and look at me, Mthokozisi is a bit fidgety but he also has panic all over him.

"We have to take you to the hospital. Mum and dad are already there. Phila is here to watch Hlelo." Mthokozisi tells me. I look at Sphetho and I feel a chilling sensation run down my spine.

"Why?" My voice comes out in a whisper, but just loud enough for them to hear.

"We don't know. The hospital called and mum said we should come get you." Sphetho says. I guess

they also dont know what is going on. So there is only one way to find out what's happening.

"Let me go change."

The drive to the hospital seems to be taking forever. I'm not sure what to expect, but sitting in the backseat of this car, I say a silent prayer asking God to give me the strength to handle whatever is coming.

PS: apologies for the disappearing act. I'm still here

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I'm scared. Really scared. No one has said a word since we left the house. The silence alone makes my heart pound even harder. I'm pretty sure by now I wouldn't need a stethoscope to see how much my heart is beating, one look at my chest and a doctor would tell you how many beats a minute my heart is going.

We pull up to the hospital and as soon as I get out of the car I stop and pray, again. I'm pretty sure God is working overtime right now listening to me beg and plead. I'm sure he is also shocked, cause the only time he hears from me is in the morning when I wake up and in the evening when I go to bed. And the occasional 'Oh God' I scream out in the middle of

an orgasm. Other than that, me and him keep it professional.

We walk into the hospital, Sphetho is on the phone with someone who is directing us where they are. I'm not even sure why we need directions because we all know exactly where his room is. We follow directions till we make it to the waiting area where everyone is. And by the looks of it, everyone was caught by surprise because everyone is wearing gowns and pyjamas. I greet and take a seat next to MamKhuzwayo.

"What's going on? Why are we here?" I ask MamKhuzwayo. She seems just as scared as me, her bible and rosary are resting on her lap and her hands are clutching both tightly like they will jump out of her lap and run.

"We dont know. We just got a call and they said we must come here, its urgent. When we got here they told us to wait here, the doctor would be with us shortly and we've been waiting ever since." I sigh and look at my watch. It's late, well early because it's almost the break of dawn.

Half an hour later a doctor comes marching into the waiting area. We all stand up hoping for the best, but still prepared for the worst. The doctor takes a deep breath and his eyes run around the room. I can feel my heart slowly sinking to the pits of my stomach.

"Uhm, I apologize for waking you up so early....." he begins.

"Doctor please just tell us what's going on?" Sphetho says cutting him off.

"Of course. So about three hours ago Mr Khuzwayo woke up from his coma." All I heard was woke up and I sank into the chair behind me. While everyone is hugging and shouting hallelujah I say a silent Thank you to God.

"I know you've been waiting for a while and I apologize for that, we were running some tests on him to see what the way forward is right now." The doctor continues.

"So how is he?" His father asks. He has grown more grey hairs the past four months it's not hard to see how Makhosi's being here has affected him. He is

his first born son and the one he looked to to continue and grow Malandela Farms, I'm pretty sure seeing Makhosi lying there fighting for his life was like seeing all his Hope's laying there too.

"He will be Okay. Of course he will need a lot of therapy, especially physical therapy to help him learn how to walk again and do anything really. His wounds have healed pretty well over the past months and his liver is slowly getting back to it's normal size. We are happy with that." He tells us. Ask me again after five minutes what he said and I probably wont tell you. Even now I'm not sure what he said, I'm just waiting for him to say we can see him, but he keeps going on and on about all these medical terms and quite frankly, I dont want to hear them. I just want to see him. I send Lubanzi a text telling him that he has woken up.

"Can we see him?" I ask after sending the text. I'm not even sure what they were talking about and I dont care, I just want to see him.

"Well you can but he is resting right now." Resting? Four months of sleeping and doing nothing and he is

still resting? It must be crack.

The doctor leads us to the ward he is in now. They've moved him from the ICU and now he is in a normal recovery ward. We get in and instantly the difference is visible. He is no longer laying almost flat on the bed but he has been propped up a bit to an almost sitting position, the oxygen tube that he had earlier on has been replaced by a oxygen nasal cannula running across his face and nose. He is laying there sleeping so peacefully, if I didnt know better I'd think he was dead, but he isnt. He is alive.

We all stand together around the bed, holding hands as MamKhuzwayo leads us in prayer. Even though everyone has their eyes closed I am staring at him laying there. I take his hand into mine and he holds mine too. I almost scream when I feel his hand tighten around mine. He really is Okay.

MamKhuzwayo says Amen and everyone opens their eyes, including him. He is a bit slow but he opens them anyway. Tears stream down my face at the sight before me, his deep brown eyes are going around the room, probably trying to register

everyone who is here. His eyes land on me and the smile that forms on his face is unmissable. Its weak, but its there, and it's the most perfect thing I've seen in my entire life.

"Hi!" He says and i hear gasps all around the room. His eyes move from me to everyone else again and it's clear he remembers everyone, I dont know why I thought his brain wouldnt work but he has been here for four months.

"How are you feeling?" His father asks since the rest of us are looking at him like he is some fragile porcelain doll that will break if he even makes a single sound.

"I'm... ok. I think." He answers even though he has to take short breaths in between his words. But the fact that he can speak means he is truly okay.

The doctor comes back after a while and tells us to give Makhosi some space to rest. We all say out goodbyes and promise to come back when the sun is fully out. While everyone walks out his hand tightens around mine. For someone who has been in

a coma for four months his grip is strong. He looks at the door as everyone walks out. As soon as they are all out he turns to look at me. His smile comes back again. I pull up the chair and sit down.

"Hi." He pulls my hand up to his lips and kisses it.

"I love you." He tells me. I wipe my tears with my free hand and stare at him.

"I love you too." I tell him. His smile gets wider, I understand why though, I can count the number of times I told him I love him since we've been reunited on my one hand. But since he has been laying here I've told him every single time I've come to see him. I dont know if he remembers or that he heard me, but I've been consistent about letting him know how I feel. Life is short, if there is one thing I'll take away from all this is that life is short, and we need to cherish the people we love while they can still hear us.

"Hlelo misses you." I take my phone out of my pocket and show him a video of her screaming 'dada' all the time. His eyes feel with tears as he

looks at the video.

"She's grown." He says. He goes through my phone looking at her videos and pictures. I wipe the tears that are now falling down the side of his face.

"I'm so happy you're okay. I don't know how I was going to do this without you. Please don't ever scare me like this again." He pulls me to him and I lay my head on his abdomen, making sure not to rest entirely on it because I might hurt him again.

"I'll try. How are you?"

"I should be asking you that."

"Well I'm asking you." I chuckle and start drawing patterns on his chest.

"I'm okay, now. I'm just happy you're Okay. I have to show you something." I stand up and lift my sweater up revealing my small bump. His lips part as shock registers on his face.

"What's that?"

"What do you think?"

"You've had too many doughnuts?" I chuckle and

take a seat.

"Partly. But this is a baby."

"Whose baby?" His faces changes from shock to anger. I almost laugh but then I realise he is serious.

"Its your baby. I'm five months pregnant. Turns out I was right, you do have super sperm." I guess the joke goes over his head because he doesn't even smile. "You dont believe me?" The doctor walks back in.

"Uh, still here." He says looking at me. "I know you're happy he is Okay, but seriously, he needs to rest." I stand up and smile at the doctor then turn back to Makhosi. His face is still cold. He went from being happy to see me just five minutes ago and now he is as cold as ice. I cant wait for him to look stupid when he realizes this is his baby. I lean down and try to kiss him but he turns his face and all I get is his hairy cheek.

"I'll see you later." I take my phone and walk out of there.

In a normal setting I'd most likely would have broken

the vase over his head, but he just came out of a coma so I'm going to pretend he didn't try to accuse me of something. He didn't say it out loud but I could sense it in his tone and question, even his coldness just confirmed it. I find Sphetho and Mthokozisi waiting for me in the waiting area.

"Hey, you guys are still here?"

"Yeah, we drove you here. Are you ready?"

Mthokozisi asks. I nod my head and we walk out to the car.

"Did you tell him about the baby?" Sphetho asks as we drive out of the parking lot.

"Yep, I did."

"He must be excited." Oh he is alright.

"Super excited."

••••••••••

This is the second time I set my foot in a prison. I

just hope this time it's the last time. I haven't had enough energy to deal with Precious and her murderer self, between having a small baby, a baby daddy in a coma and the effects of a first trimester pregnancy, I had to choose my battles, and Precious was definitely at the bottom of the list.

A guard follows behind her as she walks to the visitors area, hands and feet in shackles, she takes one short step after the other until she is standing right in front of me. She looks down at me like I'm some piece of irritating gum under her shoe. The guard pushes her into the seat.

"What do you want?" I guess jail hasn't done much to tone down her attitude.

"I dont want anything. I must say though, orange looks good on you, it really brings out your eyes." She rolls her eyes and tries to stand up but the guard pushes her back onto the seat. "So how's jail treating you?"

"You won? Why are you here?"

"I didnt even know we were in a competition. And if

we were in one, I'm pretty sure I didn't win when you tried to kill Makhosi and he lived, I won the day he laid eyes on me and somehow your place in his life became nonexistent."

"He's alive?"

"You tried, I'll give you credit for that, you really tried, but Makhosi doesn't give up that easily."

"How is he?" I chuckle and lean on the table getting close to her.

"Not dead, Unfortunately for you. You tried to take him away from me and all you did was get yourself a one way ticket to prison. How long do you have to be in here now? Ten, fifteen years? Hlelo will probably be an adult by then, Makhosi and I will probably have added more kids to our brood, we'll be married by then, live in our own little picket fence home, well this is South Africa so it will probably be a ten foot high brick fence, but still a fence nonetheless, so maybe you're right. I did win." I stand up and get my bag. "I'll tell Makhosi you said hi. Have a nice life."

I walk out and head to my car. I was nervous when I

was coming here, but now I know Precious is just a stupid little girl who couldn't accept rejection so she resorted to committing a crime, and seeing her in that orange jumpsuit just shows she's more bark than bite. Now that I've told her what I needed to say I drive to the hospital.

I get to the hospital and I'd like to believe this man has had enough time to digest everything, because if he is going to do what he did the last time, questioning my child and his paternity, we are going to have a problem. I meet his parents in the parking lot as they are heading home, I greet them and go in.

When I get to his room he is laying on the bed with his eyes closed. I want to tiptoe in but these heels are too loud for their own good. I walk in and his eyes shoot open.

"Hi." He smiles. Okay, we might just be on the right track cause early this morning he was cold as ice and now he is smiling. I pull up the chair and sit down.

"Hi. How are you feeling?"

"Good. Doctor says I can start physio in a week."

"That's good." Silence. Weird, awkward silence.

"I'm sorry." He says breaking the silence in the room.

"Mum explained things to me, and the doctor says I've been here for four months so the baby is mine. I'm sorry I doubted you. I shouldn't have done that."

"Just out of curiosity, why would you ask me that?"

"Because I'm stupid, and I've been in a coma for a while now so my brain is kind of clogged up."

"I agree on the first part." He chuckles and holds his hand out to me. I take and he pulls me to him. I get off the chair as he makes space on the bed. I climb up and lay on his chest.

"I'm glad you came back inspite of my stupid comment. How are you? Really?" I sigh and wrap my arms around his abdomen.

"I'm happy. You missed my birthday, but this is the best birthday present I could ever get. You're alive, everything seems right with the world right now."

"I'm happy to hear that." His hand goes down to my

tummy. "So how is he or she treating you?"

"He, is treating me okay. Just a little nausea here and there, some cramps, dizziness and tiredness but other than that, he is treating me better than Hlelo did." He laughs. I can't believe I havent heard his laugh in over four months.

"That one is a drama queen, I wonder ufuze bani (I wonder who she takes after.)"

"I'm pretty sure she takes after her grandmother." We both turn to the door and see my parents standing there. They walk in and I get off the the bed.

"Dont listen to him, his entire family is full of drama queens, Hlelo had to take after someone." We laugh. My mum gives Makhosi a hug and my dad shakes his hand.

"Welcome back to the land of the living. You scared us there."

"Thank you, I'm glad to be back." My parents sit and chat for a while before they have to leave promising Makhosi they will come back and see him tomorrow, right now they have a granddaughter to spoil.

As soon as they walk out the door I get back on the bed.

"I'll do it."

"Do what?"

"Marry you? I'll do it." I feel his eyes on me. After a minute or so of his silence I look up at him.

"You know you dont have to do that just because i almost died."

"Its not because of that. I was always going to marry you. I know I didnt tell you this enough before but i love you, and I want to spend my life with you. You drive me nuts ninety nine percent of the time but I wouldnt have it any other way. Our story might not have the most conventional beginning but"

"We can have the best ending?"

"Well not an ending per say, just the start of a different chapter." His head leans down and he takes my lips in his. Still as warm as I remember.

"I love you Mrs Khuzwayo." He says staring deep into my eyes.

"Make that Mrs Majola-Khuzwayo." He chuckles and kisses my forehead.

"I dont care where Khuzwayo appears in the algorithm, as long as it's there and everyone knows you're my wife."

He kisses me again, and this time the kiss is deeper and passionate. It's too early for this but it's been four months of self service and a little kiss wont hurt right? No? This one has a heart monitor attached and soon it starts beeping out of control. We stop kissing when the nurses and doctors rush in thinking something is wrong.

"Mr Khuzwayo. This is not the time for that." The doctor says. The nurses behind him giggle.

"Sorry about that doctor. We will try and keep it PG."

"That would be nice. And Miss Majola, The bed is for the patient." I chuckle and hide my head on Makhosi's chest.

"She'll be down in a second Doctor." The Doctor shakes his head and walks out with his army.

"I think I know why the nurses were laughing." He looks at me with his brows arched. I point to the tent that's been pitched between his legs. The joys of not having any clothes on under the blankets.

"Oh look at that. It still works. Perfect." Yep. He is back alright.

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Apartment, cleaned. Bedding, changed. Groceries, stocked up. Snacks, plenty of those. Alcohol, all poured down the drain, okay maybe not all. I have a few bottles of wine stacked somewhere in this house waiting for the day I pop out this baby. Until then, juice and water it shall be. I'll just have to close my eyes and pretend its wine.

I took the day off of work today to make sure the apartment is clean and ready for Makhosi to come home to. I stocked up on plenty of food and snacks. Being in a wheelchair is frustrating enough as it is for him, I just hope being home will ease his anxiety a bit. He thinks just because he cant walk properly

now he wont ever be able to walk again. But I think it's more fear than anxiety. And that's why I've hired a private physiotherapist to help him right here in the privacy of his home. Look at me being domesticated and shit.

I do some last minute touches around the house before I load Hlelo in the car and we drive to the hospital. I'm sure Makhosi is ready to get out of there, well he was ready the moment he woke up but doctors had to make sure he was really okay. I get to the hospital and his parents car is already parked close to the entrance. I hope they are not here to take him to the farm. I get Hlelo in her stroller and push her into the hospital. I get to his room and I hear voices coming from inside. It's not the doctor judging by the way these people are talking. I get closer and it all makes sense now, Zama is trying to convince him to go home with her.

"Okay so who is going to watch you during the day when she's at work? You cant expect the nanny to take care of the baby and then take care of you.

Atleast at home you'll be with mum and I'll be there too to help you." She tells him.

"I'm not an invalid Zama, I can take care of myself. Besides, I want to be with my family, I've been in a coma for too long."

"Oh, so what are we? Strangers? Your siblings are strangers? Your parents?" Trust Zama to bring the drama even when it's unnecessary. I've heard enough of this mess. I push the door in with the stroller and the siblings turn to look at me, the stank eye from Zama is almost amusing. I wonder if she knows Makhosi and I are getting married? I'd love to see her face when she finds out.

"Hey baby." Makhosi says. I stop in the middle of the room.

"Me or her?" I ask pointing at Hlelo. Makhosi smiles and opens his arms. He is sitting on the bed, his legs dangling on the side already in his track pants and sweats, he has his sneakers on and its obvious he is ready to bounce.

"Both my babies." I know he is lying. I get Hlelo out

of the stroller and hand her to him before I kiss him on the cheek. I take a seat next to Makhosi. While daddy and daughter bond I look at my future sister in law.

"Skoni, (sister-in-law) how are you?" She chuckles and rolls her eyes.

"Jumping the gun arent we? Until you're married to my brother, please dont call me that. That's if you'll ever get married." I feel Makhosi silently laughing next to me.

"Hawu baby, you didnt tell her?" He looks at me and tries to hide the smile but I can see it. He is way too amused about this.

"Uhm, I didn't get time." He says. He turns to his sister. "Zama, Tivi and I are getting married. Bomalume (the uncles) are going down to Durban next week to start negotiations."

"WHAT?" Zama and I say in unison. I dont know why she is shocked. I'm shocked he has decided on a date and it's all systems go apparently.

"Wait, what do you mean your uncles are going to

Durban next week?" I ask him. He can't hit me with a surprise like this and expect me to be happy.

"I figured I might as well send them before you change your mind." He answers nonchalantly so.

"It's too soon for this, you just got out of a coma, you need to get back on your feet first before you think about anything else." Zama says. I never thought I'd see the day I would ever agree with her on anything, but stranger things have happened.

"I can feel the bitterness in my mouth saying this but she is right. This is not something we can rush. We have our whole entire lives to get married. Why rush it?"

"You love me right?" He asks me.

"Of course I love you?" What kind of question is that?

"And you want to marry me?"

"Yes I do. But Makhosi..."

"But nothing." He wraps his one free arm around my shoulders and pulls me to him. "I want us to be a family, I want to do right by you before the baby

arrives. Besides all that, I was ten seconds from dying before I could do all the things I wanted to do. I don't want to waste any more time, life is too short."

"But you're alive and you have all the time in the world to do what you want to do. You don't have to do it now." Zama says. Okay now this is the moment her and I part ways.

"Are you sure you're ready for this?" He turns to look at me. We stare into each other's eyes as if the world and everything else in it has disappeared.

"Are you for real right now? Weren't you agreeing with me just now that it's too soon for this?" I hear Zama faintly shouting from somewhere in the universe.

"Baby, I've been ready. I want you to be Mrs Khuzwayo as in yesterday. I don't want to spend any more time without making you mine, in every way." Makhosi says, a faint smile on his lips accompanied by stars and hearts in his eyes.

"Okay. I guess we are getting married next week." His smile widens and he pulls me close to him and

kisses me.

"I dont believe this." Zama says. Seconds later she bangs the door as she walks out.

Getting Makhosi up to the apartment turned out to be easier than I thought. He can push himself with the wheelchair. Not that he needs it but until his physiotherapist says he is good to go then he will have to get used to it despite his protests.

I help him sit on the couch. I put a throw over him and hand him the remote. I need to start on dinner.

"Are you comfortable?"

"Not really. There is something here." He says pointing to his side. I reach over to see what's bothering him and instead of seeing anything he pulls me down till I'm sitting on his lap.

"Really?"

"I missed you."

"I missed you too but I need to start on dinner."

"No need for that. Ndalo and the others are coming over and they are bringing meat and salads, they will cook the pap when they get here." I'm not sure about people being in my kitchen but I guess I can grant him this one thing. I know he has missed his friends.

"Fine. So what do I have to do?"

"Nothing. Just sit next to me."

"And do what?" His lips curve into a mischievous smile.

"Hlelo is sleeping, but someone else wants to wake up. He's been sleeping for four months. Four!" He emphasises the four by lifting up four fingers making me laugh.

"Okay then. Let's see what we can do to wake your little friend up." I straddle him. He chuckles.

"Little, you say." His hands grab my butt squeezing tight. I kiss him while slowly grinding on him. I pull out of the kiss and pull his sweat shirt off of him. His

tshirt follows. My eyes land on the scar on his shoulder and I freeze. His eyes follow my gaze and even though he can't see the scar properly, he touches it.

"It's not that bad, you know." He says staring back at me.

"I know. I just can't believe she wanted to kill you. How do you say you love someone and then want to hurt them?" His fingers turn my face to him.

"Babe. Don't even think about it. It's over and done with. You said she is in jail right?" I nod my head.

"Then we have nothing to worry about. She is out of our lives."

"But the scars are still there, a reminder of her heartless actions. How do I forget that."

"Well, we probably won't ever forget but we still have our lives, we have a wedding to plan, a baby to prepare for and a house to buy. We have so much to do and so much to live for, while she is locked up our lives continue, so don't let her even take up a single space in your heart or head. She's the biggest loser

here." Who knew Makhosi Khuzwayo would turn into a motivational speaker. The miracles of comas I tell you.

"Now back to the business at hand." He says. I lean in to kiss him but a knock disturbs me.

"Saved by the bell." I get off him and fix myself while he puts on his tshirt. I open the door and find his friends standing there. He was right about the meat, each of them has a takeaway.

"Mrs Khuzwayo." Lubanzi says as they walk in and the noise begins. I leave them to go check on Hlelo. She's still fast asleep. I decide to join her and let the friends catch up.

When I wake up the house is quiet and dark. I try to get out of bed but an arm holds me back. I turn around and find Makhosi sleeping behind me.

"Go back to sleep." He whispers.

"What time is it?"

"It's late. Go to sleep." I snuggle closer to him and fall

back to sleep. It's been lonely being alone in this bed, but now things are back to the way they should be.

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NARRATED

At the Joburg Maximum prison, Wale is sleeping soundly in his cell when the bars open and a guard walks to his bed. He pulls the flimsy blanket off of him waking him up.

"What the fuck bro?" Wale asks.

"Get up and follow me!" The guard tells him. Wale mumbles something and pulls the blanket back up. The guard pulls the blanket again and lands two punches on his face.

"What the heck?" Wale shouts waking his cellmates up mumbling and grumbling.

"I said follow me. Do you think this is Leki Island?"

The guard says missing Wale off even more. He gets off the bed and the guard shackles his legs and hands before he follows him out. The guard takes him to an office. He is shocked to find his cousin Alex sitting on the warden's desk.

"Hi cousin." Alex says, a huge smile on his face. The guard leaves them alone and walks out, closing the door behind him.

"What are you doing here Alex, where is my father?" Alex chuckles looking at his shackled cousin.

"Your dad is probably sleeping peacefully in his bed, at home, where you're supposed to be, but here you are." Alex says looking at Wale from head to toe.

"So you came here to gloat?" Alex laughs.

"Gloat? No. You know I've been waiting patiently for the day when you would fuck up. All our lives you've treated me like I was a nobody, no matter how hard I tried you made sure to remind me that I'm just a charity case leeching off of your father. You were always ready to remind me that you are the heir to the Joshua empire. I can't believe there was a time I

wished to be you. Or like you, but now I'm glad i was patient. Now you are in jail, and in a couple of days your father will be announcing his retirement and naming me as the one to take over running Joshua Industries."

Wale's blood boils at Alex's announcement. Here he was hoping and praying his father would come to his rescue, he has done it before, everytime he fucked up, his father was there, ready and willing to rescue his first born son and save the Joshua name from being humiliated, but now he has completely abandoned him. And not only that, he has replaced him, with Alex of all people. The same person he belittled and treated like that is now getting ready to take over his place.

"Don't waste your breath thinking too much, you will need that energy to figure out a way to survive in here." Alex tells him as he jumps off the desk. "Dont worry brother, I will take care of the family." He pats Wale's shoulder and walks out.

Wale stands there like a statue, rage, anger and revenge bubbling deep inside of him.

"You will pay for this Tivikele Majola. I will make sure of it, even if it's the last thing I do. You will pay." He says to the empty room

THE PLAYERS GUIDE

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Unedited

Makhosi owes me big time for this. Who in their right sane mind plans an event in less than two weeks. Well technically speaking it's not that big an event but still, a lot of planning has to go into it. Sure we dont need to repaint the house or cut the grass but we do need to prepare for the coming visitors.

I've been working from home since Monday, my parents insisted I come home. I've been working while everyone goes shopping and doing what needs to be done before Saturday. And thanks to baby pull out, I don't need to do much. Two of my cousins came from Eswatini and two others came from Nkandla which is my dads home. They've been doing the heavy lifting. Simz, Thobi and Pinky will fly down Friday after work. Thobi will be responsible for the cooking and making sure the Khuzwayo delegation

remembers this weekend for the rest of their lives.

Mum walks into my room with Hlelo sleeping peacefully on her back and another woman behind her. I close the laptop and look at them.

"Hi, nana, are you busy?" Mum asks. The woman gives me an awkward smile.

"Not really. I was just replying to some work emails. What's going on?"

"MaMhlongo is here to take measurements for the dress you'll be wearing Saturday." She tells me. MaMhlongo's smile goes from awkward to excited.

"I need a dress?" Their smiles vanish and they look at me like I just put sugar in amasi.

"Of course you need a dress." Mum shouts startling Hlelo. "You need a dress. Do you think when they ask to see the bride you'll show up in some old dress? Hhay wena, they must know who you are. My babygirl." She continues pinching my cheeks like I'm a baby. "I cant believe you're getting married." Mum and her different moods in just seconds. She went from being startled to being proud to being

emotional all in the same breath.

"Okay then. Let's get these measurements done. I still need to..... What do I need to do again?" I dont even know how she is going to have a dress ready by Saturday. If she can do it in two days then I'll know for sure she is an expert at this sewing thing.

"Nothing my baby. All you have to do is be pretty and glow, mummy will take care of everything." She holds out her hand pulling off the bed. MaMhlongo does her business and her stare when she notices my bump is filled with judgement.

"What's wrong?" I ask seeing as she now seems distracted.

"Are you pregnant. Again?" She whispers as if she doesn't want my mum to hear.

"Yes. Do you have a problem with that?" She fakes a smile and shakes her head.

She finishes taking her measurements and says her goodbyes. Mum walks her out while I go back to my emails. My phone beeps indicating a message. I pick it up and it's from a number I dont know. All it says is

'revenge is a dish best served cold.' I try to call the number but it sends me straight to voicemail. I'm not sure who this is but I have a bit of an idea. Only one person would want revenge for something, and that's Wale. Well I guess two if you count Precious. I try the number again and it still goes to voicemail. Whoever it is I hope they know what they are doing.

I take a few breaths in and out trying to get this message out of my head. I go back to my emails and do what I have to do. An hour later I'm done with work, for now anyway. I close the laptop and go to the lounge to join everyone. Even with all the laughter going on I still can't get that email out of my head.

"So mzala, how did you get the great Makhosi Khuzwayo to ask for your hand in marriage?" My cousin Busisiwe asks. My lips crack into a smile while staring at the carrots in front of me.

"I'm pretty sure when he posts his wedding pictures the whole slay queen nation will come to a standstill." My other cousin Kuhle adds.

"His feeding scheme is really coming to an end." Busi adds. You'd think I wasn't here the way these two are going. And what feeding scheme are they even talking about?

"What feeding scheme nine?" They laugh and look at each other.

"Cuz, no offense but everyone knows the man used to throw cash at the slay queens like it was nobody's business. I'm pretty sure if he had a waiting list it would be the size of Moses Mabhida stadium. If ever there was a SASSA for slay queens, he would have been the CEO." Kuhle says. Well he did try to add me to that feeding scheme but it didn't work, and that's why we are here today.

"In all seriousness though." Busi starts getting serious. "I'm happy for you, you deserve this and it's clear he makes you happy. And that's all that matters. His past might be colorful, but his present and future are shining bright like the summer sun."

"Of course it is. He is marrying a Majola, how else is his future supposed to be?" Kuhle and her dramatics.

These two and their drama are exactly what I needed to get that text out of my head, even for a moment. Gcinile and our two other cousins come back from God alone knows where just before dinner. As huge as my immediate family is, add the extended family and it's an entire tribe, and right now the huge dining room table my parents have is enough for everyone to sit comfortably.

"You seem distracted. What's wrong?" Bahole asks me after dinner, I've been sitting out here just getting some fresh air for a while now. Even though everyone is here too making jokes and laughing, the text refuses to leave my head. I take my phone out and show him the text. "Who sent you this?" I shrug my shoulders.

"I dont know. But I think it might be Wale."

"He doesn't give up does he?"

"Clearly not. I dont understand how his choices somehow became my fault. And now I'm supposed to be looking over my shoulder just because he couldnt accept rejection."

"Don't stress about it. I'll ask a friend of mine to look into it. Just focus on you and leave Wale to me. I'll take care of it. Just screenshot the message and send it to me."

Bahole and I fight the most but when it comes down to it, no one has my back like he does. He is too overprotective but I wouldn't change him for anything in the world. After my talk with Bahole I rest a bit and join the conversation happening around me.

After everyone has retired to sleep I decide to get some work done before I sleep. Hlelo is with her grandparents so I'm free as a bird. My phone beeps and my heart jumps. I'm scared of who it might be and what they want. I take a few deep breaths before I open the message. I relax when I see Makhosi's name on the notification. Speaking of that one I need to change his name from just Makhosi Khuzwayo to My love, atleast. I open the message and it says he is outside my house. He must be drunk cause one, he is not allowed to drive and two, he should not be here today. I decide to call him.

"Hey."

"What do you mean you're outside?" I stand up and peek through the window and sure enough there is a car parked just a few meters down the road.

"I'm outside your house. Come out."

"Please dont tell me that's you parked down the road." Even though my heart is really hoping that's him, common sense says different.

"You can see me?" He flicks his lights on and off and I know for sure its him. Idiot. I hope someone drove him here.

"I'm coming." I hang up and put on my gown and slippers. Now to sneak out of here like a fifteen year old sneaking to a party.

I tiptoe all the way to the kitchen before the lights go on while I'm trying to open the backdoor. I turn around to find my mother standing there looking at me like I've just been caught cheating on a test.

"Going somewhere?" Yeah this is exactly how I felt when she caught me sneaking in from a party when I was in high school. It was after the party so the punishment was worth it. But now I'm an adult and I

need to act as such, and sneaking out is not an adult thing to do. Right? "Cat got your tongue?"

"Uhm..... I was....."

"You were what?" I clear my throat.

"I'm actually going to see Makhosi. He is outside." I cant believe how calm my voice sounds right now because my heart is threatening to jump out of my chest.

"So why are you sneaking out? You're an adult with a baby sleeping and another on the way, why are you acting like some teenage girl?" Okay I wasnt expecting that.

"Really?" She moves from where she was standing and gets a glass from the cupboard then fills it with water.

"You're an adult. Just be back before your father wakes up." She switches the lights off and goes back to her room. I open the door and walk out.

I get to the car and Makhosi opens the passenger door for me. I get in and look at him sitting on the

drivers seat.

"What is wrong with you? Why are you driving?" He chuckles.

"Hi baby, I missed you too. A kiss would be nice." I mentally roll my eyes and lean over to him and kiss him.

"How did you get here?" Stupid question, I know. But I'm hoping he will say one of his friends dropped him here then left.

"You do know I have a drivers license right."

"Makhosi, you're not allowed to drive. You do remember that right?"

"I also remember I'm not paralyzed. I was just in a coma for four months. My legs didnt stop working they just went to sleep. Sort off. Anyways, if it's any consolation, I was driving slow. That's why it took me an hour to get here." I know he is trying to be funny but I dont get the joke.

"When did you get to Durban?"

"Earlier today. My uncles didn't want to drive down

tomorrow, apparently their borns are old and rusty now so they need tomorrow to rest." I guess that makes sense.

"Okay."

"Am I forgiven for using my legs." I smile.

"How are you feeling?"

"Better. The physiotherapist knows his thing. Although my legs hurt like hell after each session but the fact that I'm here now means he is good."

"I'm glad to hear that." I reach over to his side of the car and push the seat back before I straddle him.

"Okay. You did miss me." He says chuckling. His hands immediately cup my bums.

"I did. I really did." I kiss him with my hands cupping his face. Now I know I should have changed these pyjamas. Makhosi opens the gown revealing the fleece pyjamas. I guess he doesn't care about it. His hands go under my top brushing my bump before pulling me to him. His hands go down my pyjamas pants cupping my naked bottom. He lifts me off of

him and places me on the passenger seat before pulling my pants out. When it's out I get back on top of him.

"So I need to tell you something." This is probably the wrong time to be telling him this but I know him and his ego, if I dont tell him he might just feel offended.

"What's wrong?" He asks with his fingers rubbing my clit back and forth. I lean down and kiss him on the neck.

"I.... got a text..... I think it's from Wale."

"What did he say?"

"He said revenge is a dish best served cold." He stops rubbing my clit and pushes me back to look at me in the eyes.

"He said that?" I nod my head. "That son of a bitch. What needs to happen for him to leave you alone?"

"I dont know. All I know now is that I need us to finish what we started. We will see Wale when the sun rises."

"We need to get you security. And we need to have a small intimate wedding." I nod my head but truth is he can get the security, now as for the wedding being intimate, with our mothers wanting to plan the entire wedding, an intimate wedding will remain a pipe dream.

"Whatever you say baby."

"I know you're just trying to shut me up so I'll let you." I laugh and kiss him again. He lifts himself up a bit and pulls down his pants allowing his erect dick to stand at attention. I feel it rubbing on me. I grind on him a bit before I feel him slip into me. I lower myself down on him going round and round and up and down on him. His hands go up my top again cupping my boobs and fondling as I bounce on him.

"I love you." I go faster and faster till I feel him groan. I raise myself up and he slips out of me.

"I love you too. And, scared as I am I cant wait to spend the rest of my life with you." He looks up at me and a smile masks his face. He inserts himself back inside me. I move up and down his dick for a

few minutes before I hear him groan as he spills his seed inside me. Good thing I'm already pregnant.

NARRATED

In Lagos, Mabutho has just landed at the airport with Mr Joshua in his private jet. They get off the plane then they are driven to Lekki Island where Mr Joshua resides. They get into the house and Mabutho is shown a room where he will spend the night. He takes a shower and gets ready for dinner. After a long flight he gets an opportunity to open his phone and check his messages. He finds a message from Bahole telling him about the threatening message that Tivikele got. He goes down to the dining room where Mr Joshua is working.

"Ah, Mabutho, dinner will be ready soon. Would you like something to drink?" Joshua asks standing up and going to the bar.

"Just whiskey please. Neat." Joshua pours the whiskey and comes back to his seat. He hands the

glass to Mabutho who takes it and swirls the liquid around.

"Something's bothering you. What's wrong?" Joshua asks. Mabutho takes a sip of the drink.

"Can I ask you something?"

"Sure. Ask me."

"Your son. Does he ever give up?" Joshua sips his own drink. He doesn't need to even ask which son Mabutho is talking about. He knows whenever someone talks of his son, somewhere somehow Wale will be brought up. Eight kids, and none of them have given him as much trouble as Wale. Some were rebels in high school or varsity, but when it came down to it, they knew when to reel it in and focus on work and growing up.

"What has he done now?"

"He is threatening my sister. After he went out of his way trying to destroy her, even when he is behind bars he still wants revenge. I'm not sure how you'll take this sir, but family means everything to me and for my siblings, I'll jump through hell for them. And

right now your son is treading on thin ice." Joshua sighs and takes his drink and looks at it before taking another sip.

"I understand. I have just one request. Allow me to deal with my son. I know and understand your need to protect your sister, rightly so. But ease let me deal with my son. He will never bother your sister again."

Mabutho nods his head and sips his drink as food is placed before him. After dinner Mabutho goes to his room and sleeps. Joshua makes a short phonecall to someone before also going to sleep.

Meanwhile in a prison in Johannesburg, South Africa, Wale is laying on his cold rusty bed looking up at the ceiling, or rather the concrete roof above him. His cellmate gets off the bed and walks towards him.

"Why arent you sleeping man?" He asks Wale. Wale shrugs his shoulders, not taking his eyes off of the ceiling. The cell mate puts a knife on his throat, startling him.

"What do you think you're doing?" Wale asks with his panic laced voice.

"Just following orders buddy. I was given orders to tell you that you have brought nothing but shame to the Joshua name. You have embarrassed your father at every turn and even behind bars you are still not ready to humble yourself and be a better man ."

The cell mate says slowly cutting into Wale's throat.

"Look, whatever they are paying you, I'll double it. Heck I'll triple it. Just don't do this man." Wale begs. "My father will pay you whatever you want." The cell mate chuckles.

"Oh buddy, say hi to satan." The blade slices through Wale's neck leaving him gasping for breath while blood bubbles out of his throat. The cellmate gets back into his bed and watches as Wale takes his last breath. When he is certain death has claimed him he takes a phone from under his pillow and makes a call.

"It's done." He tells the person on the other end. He puts the phone back in its place and closes his eyes as sleep takes over.

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Unedited

My back hurts. I need to put a hot water bottle on it before it gets worse. I get off the bed and head to the kitchen. I find my sister and cousins already busy with breakfast. My friends are flying down today and hopefully Mabutho makes it here before the negotiations. No one knows where in the world he is but he did send a message saying he will be here for the negotiations. Mzwandile is already on his way here from Cape Town, well Bahole is here every night so I know he will be here tomorrow.

"Good morning ladies." I greet and open the drawer and take out the hot water bottle. I fill it with hot water and put it on my back.

"What's wrong with your back?" Kuhle asks.

"I dont know. It hurts like hell." I move the water

bottle and put it back again. Mum walks in and gives me a side eye.

"Maybe we should take you to the hospital." Busi says concern framing her face. Mum chuckles and takes a sip of the tea that Gcinile handed her.

"Theres no need for that. She'll be fine. These are the effects of having sex in the car." Everyone turns to look at her. She stands there like she didn't just drop an entire bomb on me.

"What are you talking about?" I ask her. "I did not have sex in the car."

"I wasnt born yesterday Tivikele. I've had my fair share of sex in the car. Not only is it uncomfortable, your body contouring and being bent over in different ways will lead to muscles and bones acting up." Kill me now.

"Mum, please. Not now." My cousins and sister are giggling under their breath.

"A little advice. If you're going to have sex in the car make sure you drive to some deserted place, in that way you can open the car doors so your legs can

dangle outside and in that way blood will flow to them, and you can even have your ass out the doors....."

"MUM! PLEASE!" She shrugs her shoulders and sips her tea

"I'm just trying to help you."

"Thank you but I dont need help."

"Clearly you do. That's why you have a sore back because you weren't even paying attention to the steering wheel digging on your back." I swear when God was giving out mothers he handed me a savage. Most mothers would be reprimanding their children, but not mine, she is busy giving out tips. And to make matters worse now I can't get the picture of her bent over the car seat. Dear Lord, help me.

I take my hot water bottle and leave them laughing like hyenas in the kitchen. I get to my bedroom and take a doek. I use it to tie the hot water bottle behind me. I get relief with it sitting there. I take my laptop out to get some work done. The door opens and Bahole walks in. He looks a bit flustered.

"Hey. When did you get here?" I ask him. He takes a seat on the other side of the bed.

"Just now. Wale is dead?" I open my mouth to say something but my throat immediately becomes dry. I know I didn't like the guy but I didn't want him dead. This is not what I meant when I said I wanted him out of my life.

I take a sip of water from the glass sitting on my bedside table. My hands are shaking and I don't know why. Well I do know why, as much as I am trying not to think about it, I hope this is not what Bahole meant when he said he would handle Wale. I put the glass back and look at my brother's back.

"How did he die?" I'm scared of what his answer will be. I'm just praying he will say Wale died of a heart attack or Ebola.

"Someone slit his throat in his sleep." Oh God. I haven't had breakfast yet but I feel the contents of whatever is left over from last night's dinner bubble up inside me. I rush to the bathroom and empty everything in the toilet bowl. I gag but my stomach is

now empty so all I get out is air. I flush the toilet and rinse my mouth before going back to the bedroom. I find Bahole sitting in the same position with his head hung. I'm not sure yet if its hung in shame or guilt.

I close the door behind him and sit on the bed looking at him.

"I probably shouldn't be asking you this....."

"I didnt kill him." He says cutting me off. "I think his father did." Okay, I'm glad my brothers hands are clean but now I am more confused than ever.

"I dont understand." He sighs and lifts his head up. For the first time since he came into my room he looks at me in the eye. I look into his eyes too and his eyes are blank. I cant really read his emotions or what is going there, but I know it's not guilt. I relax a bit knowing my brother is innocent.

"Mabutho has been piloting Joshua senior's private jet for the past two weeks. I told him about the message. Last night he sent me a text saying he spoke to Joshua about it and this morning Wale is dead." My heart beat runs like Usain Bolt seeing the

finish line at the realization that Wale is dead because of me. He died because of me. Fear and panic grips my soul. I have blood on my hands. Indirectly so but still, its blood.

"So he had him killed because of me?" Even though I am praying he says no, he killed his son for other reasons, it's too much of a coincidence that he died after sending that text. And even so, how do we know he sent the text? Oh Lord, what if he died for nothing? How am I going to explain to God that a man died because of me.

"I dont know. But I doubt it."

"Come on Bahole, this can't be a coincidence."

"Maybe. But until we know what happened there is no need to speculate."

"Fine. Did you find out where the text came from?"
He shakes his head.

"I have a friend working on it. I should have an idea by the end of the day."

"What if he is not the one who sent the text?" His

eyebrows scrunch together to form a frown.

"What do you mean what if he is not the one who sent the text. Who else could have sent it?"

"I dont know. Somebody. Precious, there's Mulalo and then theres Zama."

"Really Tivikele, you think one of Makhosi's exes or his sister could be threatening you?"

"I dont know. But I wouldn't put it past any of them. Heck Makhosi almost died because his ex shot him, and his sister is as vindictive as they come, so yes, one of them could have done it."

"Okay, Understandable. But I doubt it's any of them." His phone rings in his pocket. He takes it out and talks to whoever it is. In less than a minute he is done. He turns to look at me. "That was my contact at the police station. They found a phone inside Wale's mattress, and on that phone was a message on his sent folder. 'Revenge is a dish best served cold.' So there's your answer."

I should feel relieved right? But I'm not. Yes he sent the message, but a man is still dead. And it might be

because of me.

"Yeah neh."

A horizontal line of 20 black dots. The dots are arranged in a sequence: a group of 5 dots, followed by a gap of 6 dots, followed by another group of 5 dots, followed by a gap of 4 dots, and finally a group of 4 dots. This represents the sequence 5, 6, 5, 4, 4.

NARRATED

In Nigeria, Mabutho is getting ready for his flight back to South Africa, he finishes packing his bag then walks downstairs where Joshua senior is having his breakfast. He joins him at the table.

"I'm glad you're up. You can now fly us to South Africa." Mabutho stops chewing the bread in front of him and looks at Joshua.

"You're going to South Africa?" He asks him. He is hoping he would say yes because that would make his trip back home easier.

"Yes. I am. I've already done the pre checks and we should be able to fly out in about three hours."

"Okay. Will it be just you on the flight?"

"No. My two brothers are coming with us as well as my daughter Kemi." Mabutho took a sip of his tea trying to hide the smile on his face at the mention of Kemi. They've been overly friendly lately, even though he has noticed some feelings creeping up on him, he has to keep it professional for the sake of his career. But that hasn't stopped him from being kind and friendly to her and even flirting here and there.

Three hours later he is on the cockpit getting ready to take off. His co pilot Ashraf sits next to him.

"So how was your night Mr Ashraf?" Mabutho asks him. Ashraf smiles remembering the night he spent with his Nigerian conquest.

"It was good, as always. Did you see Kemi?" He asks. Tiny drops of perspiration form on Mabutho's forehead, he thought his little secret crush was safe and hidden in his heart, but clearly not.

"Of course I saw her, I'm piloting her father's plane and she is here, so yes, I saw her." Ashraf laughs at

him.

"You know for a Zulu man, you are afraid of women. Shaka would be disappointed in you." Ashraf tells him. He chuckles.

"Focus Ashraf, we dont want to crash." Ashraf laughs and mocks salute.

"Aye Aye Captain."

Five and half hours later they land at OR Tambo. The two pilots do their after landing checklist before getting off the plane. They head to the lounge where the Joshua's are waiting for their rides to the hotel. Ashraf says his goodbyes and leaves while Mabutho waits for his flight to Durban. Kemi joins him at the coffee station.

"Great flight." Kemi says pouring herself another cup of coffee.

"Thank you. So what are you guys doing here?" Mabutho asks.

"We are here to repatriate Wale's body." Kemi answers with no emotions at all. The coffee

Mabutho just tried to swallow goes down the wrong pipe and he coughs uncontrollably. "Are you Okay?" Kemi asks. She hands him a bottle of water. He opens it and takes a sip. After a few minutes his coughing dies down.

"I'm sorry, I just..... what do you mean by that? Is Wale dead?" Kemi nods her head. "How? When?" She shrugs her shoulders and sips her own coffee.

"Dad got a call early this morning from Wale's lawyer. Apparently someone slit his throat in his sleep."

Mabutho nodded his head, not sure what to make of this new information. Last night juy before going to bed, he went down to the kitchen at Joshua's house to get a bottle of water. When he came back up he heard Joshua on the phone with someone. He was telling them to put an end to something. He didnt want to think that something was Wale's life, but he also couldnt put it past Joshua either.

Being his pilot he has got to witness deals happening mode air, and sometimes those deals involved taking someone's life, a business rival or a politician who was too much of a goody two shoes

digging into Joshua's government contracts, but not once did he ever think one of those people would be his own son.

"Are you listening to me?" Kemi asked bring Mabutho back to the present.

"I'm fine. Just shocked. Life is too short hey?"

"Tell me about it."

"You dont seem to be too cut up about your brother dying."

"Well at the rate he was going, someone was going to do it eventually." Mabutho didn't know what to make of Kemi's 'I don't care' attitude. If any of his siblings would be killed he would leave no stone unturned in finding the person responsible and then he would do whatever it takes to make them pay. But the Joshua's seem to be a different breed. One of their own is dead and they are sitting here laughing like they are here for a wedding.

"I'd kill anyone who would hurt my siblings." Mabutho blurts out. Kemi looks at him and smiles.

"They are lucky to have you then, or rather let me say your parents did a great job of instilling the importance of family to you guys. Us, well, three of my younger brothers are in the States, they would rather die than come home, two older sisters are also based overseas, one in the UK and another in the USA and I have a younger sister based right here in SA. When we were growing up Wale was the egg, we all knew it and our parents were always ready to remind us that he was the 'heir apparent' to the Joshua empire. He had it drilled into him from a young age that it became a part of him. Except it was accompanied by arrogance and the expectation that everyone should bow at his feet. And he made sure to treat us like second class citizens just like our parents did. We all loved him, he was our brother but we won't miss him."

Mabutho felt a lump form on his throat. He didn't know how he would feel if he died and his sisters said they wouldn't miss him. That is not the life he would want for himself or his siblings, which is why he has been reluctant about bringing children into the

world. Especially with the different women he has dated, all he wanted to do was make sure his children grow up the way he did, financially stable and with present parents. He respected Joshua as a businessman, but as a father, he'd sooner die before he became like him.

The time came for him to board his flight home. And the first thing he would do was hug his siblings and tell them he loves them.

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TIVIKELE

Almost everyone is home. I'm nervous. With each tick of the clock I get more scared. I am about to commit to this man for the rest of my life. Earlier today after my talk with Bahole my lawyer showed up with the pre-nuptial agreement Makhosi and I had decided upon. It took some convincing for him to

even agree to it, but once he realized I wasn't planning on divorcing him and this was just to protect us especially in business he signed on the dotted line. And yes I do have a no cheating clause in there. Knowing his track record, I had to protect myself. Well with my own track record I had to protect him too.

I am hungry as a horse but we can't eat yet because Mabutho said he was ten minutes away. And that was almost an hour ago. I send him a text telling him to bring me hot wings since we can't eat without him. Twenty minutes later he shows up and he is still in his pilot uniform. For some reason seeing him in his uniform brings a smile to my face.

He walks in and finds Gcinile standing by the door, he gives her a bone crushing hug. He goes from her to Busi, then Kuhle, Gugu and Philiswa are next, even Thobi and Simz receive these hugs. I wonder what's going on with him. He goes from them to Bahole, they have a mini scuffle before Bahole accepts the hug. Mzwandile tries to give him a fist bump instead of the hug but Mabutho is having none of that. He

gets his hug then comes to me. His eyes are red like he has been crying. Now I'm more concerned than ever. He gives me a hug and whispers I love you. I hope he is not dying. God please don't let him die. He pulls away and gives me a faint smile before hugging the parents and the uncles. When he sits down silence engulfs the room and we all turn to look at him.

"Are you dying?" Mum asks the question we've all been silently asking ourselves. Mabutho is a hugger yes, but this is extreme, even for him. He chuckles and wipes a tear away before it runs down his face.

"No ma, I'm not dying. I just missed you guys." He says.

"Okay, you've missed us before what's this all about?" Bahole asks him.

"I promise you it's nothing. I just wanted you guys to know how much I love you and how happy I am to see you."

"Okay then, let's eat." Mzwandile says and proceeds to the table. Tonight we are more than we were

yesterday so the elders take the table while we sit on the couches.

"Now for real, are you Okay?" I ask Mabutho as I hand him a plate and sit down next to him. He smiles and looks at me.

"I'm fine. I promise. Joshua senior is in the country to pick up his son's remains. I think he had him killed." He whispers the last part.

"Bahole is also thinking the same thing." I tell him.

"What kind of parent does that? Wale was everything he was because his father made him that way, and now that he cant control him and he is bad for his image he kills him? Who does that? And the weird part, no one seems to care. Even his own siblings are saying good riddance." I guess that explains the hugs. "I dont know what I would do if any of you ever hated me. Sure we fight but at the end of the day I know for a fact you will always have my back."

"That goes without saying."

"Wale might have been a dick but he didnt deserve to die. Now I regret telling his father about that text."

"It's not your fault Butho. If there is a personification of the saying 'I brought you into this world and I will take you out' it would be Joshua." He chuckles.

"So vele you're getting married?"

"Shocker right?" He bursts out laughing. I look around the room and I say a silent Thank you to God. My family might not be the most perfect or sane, but we love each other and we protect each other, of course in every family there is some beef, but with the six people I consider my immediate family, I know I have six ride or dies. I pray it stays that way till eternity.

THE PLAYERS GUIDE

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Unedited

It's the dawn of a new day. I'm not sure if the flutters I feel are nerves or just pull out making his presence known. It's not even five am yet and I'm already up. I can hear my friends and cousins in the kitchen cooking. It feels surreal knowing I'm about to be someone's wife. Sure it's just the first step but it's a step nonetheless, and as scared as I am I'm also excited.

My phone beeps and vibrates on the side table. I take it and find a message from Makhosi.

-'Good morning Mrs Khuzwayo.' My lips curve into a smile.

-'Good morning Mr Khuzwayo.' I press send and wait with baited breath for a reply. I see him typing and my heart skips a bit. Who knew I'd feel like a love

sick teenager on my wedding day.

'My uncles are on their way.' My heart goes into overdrive. Soon my clan names will be shouted from the gate and everyone will know that I'm about to be someone's wife. If anyone would have told me four years ago that two months shy of my thirtieth birthday I would be a mother of one, a fiance and pregnant with baby number two, I probably would have laughed out loud. But here I am, about to tie myself to one person for the rest of my life. My player card is officially taking a rest.

'Whats the hurry for?' I send the message. He sends back a bunch of laughing emojis.

'Because I cant wait to make you mine in every way. I love you Mrs Khuzwayo.' I dont know why, today of all days, him calling me Mrs Khuzwayo sends butterflies flying around in my tummy. Or maybe it's because all the time he called me Mrs Khuzwayo it was just a pet name, but today it's becoming real. Now he, and many others will refer to me as Mrs

Khuzwayo legally.

A soft knock sends my eyes gazing at the door. The handle shifts and the door opens. My dad walks in still in his gown. Does he know abakhongi (negotiators) are a few minutes away. He walks over to the bed, pulls the duvet cover and gets in. I know what this means, he is either about to lecture me on something or he will tell me something that's going to make me cry. I put the phone away and lay my head on his shoulder. His one arm goes around my shoulders and he pulls me close to him. For a moment we stay like that, in silence. And weirdly enough the silence alone days a lot.

He puts his other arm around me and hugs me. My dad is not a crier, the last time I saw him cry was when Gcinile was accepted into medical school and today I feel a couple of tear drops on my forehead before he kisses the top of my head.

"I'm proud of you, you know. I know I might not say it often but I really am proud. You're an incredible businesswoman, an amazing mother and now you are about to be someone's wife. Now.." he releases

me from the hug and I sit up and look at him. "This step, it's a huge one. Businesses die and you can start a new one. That's life, but your life, it's the only one you'll ever have. I know your mother and your aunts are going to tell you that in marriage you hold on no matter how difficult. I want you to know that if, at any point your marriage becomes something you didnt sign up for or it becomes toxic or anything, just know your home will always be here. I dont ever want you to feel like you have nowhere to go when things get tough. I know Makhosi loves you, and he will do whatever it takes to protect you, but you can never confirm a person. I know I'm rambling, but all I'm trying to say is that, I love you my baby, you are my baby girl and no ring will ever change that. And no change of surname will change that either." I laugh and wipe the tears running down my face and give him a hug.

"Thank you daddy. I'm glad I have your blessing." Just then the Khuzwayo's start chanting our clan names outside. It's still dark outside and they are here already. They really want this over and done

with. I pull out of the hug and look at my dad.

"It's time." He looks at his watch and laughs. He gets off the bed.

"Not yet. I still need to take a long bubble bath, do my self care routine before I receive guests." He walks out laughing his lungs out. Self care? What does he even know about self care? I blame my mother for all this drama.

I get off the bed and go to the kitchen. My uncles are in the lounge having tea and scones. Rural people and waking up at the crack of dawn. I greet and join the girls in the kitchen. My girls are in their element. Even Simz with her big belly is up and busy. As soon as I enter the kitchen they start ululating. The drama.

"Makoti, why are you up so early? You should be getting your beauty sleep." Mum says after the noise has subsided.

"I couldn't sleep. So what are we making?" I take a seat on the high chair and pull a bowl of carrots towards me and start peeling.

"Nerves or excitement?" Busi asks handing me a cup

of chamomile tea. I sigh and take a sip of the burning hot liquid.

"I'm not sure. A bit of both I guess. When are they going to open for them?"

"It will be a while. Don't worry, I'm sure they are used to it. If they are seasoned negotiators then they should know how things go." Mum tells me. She's so not bothered about people shouting at the gate at the break of dawn in a suburb. Does she know the Karen's in this place?

"What if the neighbors call the police? You know there are white people around here?"

"I dare them to try." She says and continues putting together her trifle. These people are trying to sabotage me. Mum is making dessert, Thobi is cooking like she's cooking for a presidential visit, what if these people expect me to cook all this when I am performing my Makoti duties? Not that I will but it's a hypothetical question. I'm not planning on staying with the in-laws and waking up at the crack of dawn to boil water and cook soft porridge. Andizi.

And that's that on that. In my opinion that's just modern day slavery. I have no problem helping out here and there, but if the likes of Zama are going to sit there and drink tea while expecting me to wait on them hand and food then clearly they don't know me.

After hours, and the sun probably having its way with them, abakhongi are let into the house. The keys of having an open plan house, there are no doors to be closed for privacy. Works for me because I need to know what they think I'm worth. I stand in the hallway listening in a bit. I had to tell Kuhle that I'm going to the bathroom otherwise she would have followed me there. She has been assigned the tedious duty of watching me like I am a three year old. I stand there and listen.

"Cha phela, we also need to consider the fact that she wasn't a virgin when she met our son. That alone should reduce the price." Firstly I hate the word price but ke its English, what can we do. Secondly, Makhosi wasn't a virgin either, in fact the lobola should be more because I performed a miracle by getting him off the whore streets. I know I was there

too but, I'm out too.

"Was your son a virgin when he met my daughter?" I almost jump for joy when my dad asks that question. I hear silence. I feel someone pinch my ear and drag me away with it. I can't even scream. We get to my room and mum closes the door behind me and let's go of my painful ear.

"What is wrong with you?" She hisses in between her teeth.

"I just wanted to know what's going on." She shows me my dress sitting on the bed.

"Get dressed." She says before turning around and leaving. Kuhle bursts out laughing.

"Not even a warning?" She shows me my phone which I left in the room.

"I knew you were up to something. You've been gone a while." She gets up and helps me get dressed.

"I was just curious hawu. Can you believe one of his uncles wants a discount because I wasn't a virgin?"

"What? Does he know what their son was doing

before he met you? In fact why is it always the woman who has to keep her virginity but the man is free to do with his penis whatever he wants."

She's right. Why is my virginity under scrutiny when he was busy sticking his dick everywhere? After getting dressed sh leaves me and funny enough she locks the door. The dress is nice. MaMhlongo might be nosy and a gossip monger but she clearly knows her way around a sewing machine. The A-line midi dress is made out of red sishweshwe. It covers my bump just right. Its perfect.

I figure since I am here alone I might as well call Mr Joshua to pass my condolences. It's still quite weird to me that he might have killed his son. I dont have any proof yet so I dont want to be the one pointing fingers at him. He picks up after a few rings.

"Miss Majola. This is a surprise." He says as soon as he picks up. His voice doesnt sound like someone who is distraught over his sons death.

"I know. I just wanted to pass my condolences, I heard about Wale's passing. I'm really sorry."

"Thank you."

"Have the police find out who killed him? I'm sure you're ready to bring whoever is responsible for his death to book."

"Honestly, at this point I just want to bury my son and move on. I'm old Miss Majola, I should be enjoying my retirement but the past couple of years I've been putting out fires that Wale created. So forgive me if his death hasn't sunk in yet."

"I understand." I hear the key in the lock. "Mr Joshua, I'd love to chat more but I'm in the middle of my lobola negotiations. I just wanted to pass my condolences." Kuhle walks in and stands by the dresser waiting for me to finish my call.

"Thank you. And Congratulations. He is a lucky man."

"Thank you. Goodbye." I hang up and as much as he tried to hide it. I am now convinced he really did kill his son. What father would not want to know what happened to their dead son.

"They are ready for you." Kuhle tells me.

"I'm confused. Arent they supposed to ask if I know them and all that?" Last time I checked that's how most negotiations go.

"Sweety, they know you. You have a child with the man and they have paid damages so, this was just an extension of those talks." I know what she is saying makes sense but I still have many unanswered questions.

We go out and by the time we get to the lounge Makhosi is in the room too. They keep quiet when I walk in. The smile on Makhosi's face makes me smile too. I look down to the ground as I am introduced to my new family. I am officially a married woman. I am someone's wife. Still strange.

Dad tells us to serve our guests some food. I go to the kitchen to help the girls dish up. The back door is open. I walk out to tIget some fresh air. On the far end of the wall I see Mabutho on the phone with someone. He is sitting on a tree stump looking at his phone. It must be a video call. My annoying baby sister powers get into full gear.

I walk, or rather tip toe over to him and I notice he is on a video call with someone.

"Tell you what, the next time you come back to SA I will personally be your tour guide." He says before chuckling. I guess the other person said something funny. I peek over his shoulder and I get a glimpse of the girl before he jumps and cuts the call.

"What the fuck bra?" He says turning to look at me.

"What's going on between you and that girl?" I cross my arms and look at him. My question might have caught him off guard because he starts fidgeting, and I know then that he shouldn't be talking to her. Especially since he is supposed to be involved with Pinky. And this is why I didn't want him to pursue a relationship with my friend and employee.

"Nothing is going on. Relax."

"Why didn't Pinky come today? I know the story she tried to feed me was a lie but now I'm pretty sure whatever this is, is the reason why she didn't come. What's going on between you two?" He sighs and sits back on the tree stump. I walk around and stand

in front of him.

"We got into a fight a couple of weeks back."

"So you decided to move on to the next available girl?"

"Of course not, you know I am not like that."

"Mabutho, this is exactly why I didn't want you getting involved with my friend. You fuck up and now my friend wont come to the most important day of my life." As angry as I am with him I'm more angry at myself for not fighting harder to make sure the two of them stay apart.

"Hey, what makes you think I'm the one who fucked up?"

"Okay, so what did she do?" He runs his neck with his hand and looks away. I should stay out of this mess but I think I'm already in it. This one is my brother and the other is my friend. Whether I like it or not, I'm in it.

"Sisi we, your husband is hungry." Mum says poking her head out the backdoor. I click my tongue and

head back to the house. Mum hands me a tray and I take it to the lounge. I serve Makhosi with my knees a little bent. That's the best I can do for him, there is no way I am going down and kneeling on the floor. Not gonna happen. He chuckles when he sees the look his uncle gives me.

"Thank you." He says taking the tray from me. I guess I can officially say my name is Tivikele Majola-Khuzwayo. Yes I am definitely keeping my last name. Now to plan the official wedding.

A horizontal row of ten empty five-pointed star outlines, intended for a user to fill in with a color or mark to indicate a level of something, such as a rating or score.

Its late I know. But its here now dont kill me.

THE PLAYERS GUIDE

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Unedited

"You need to pick a house. Today!" And that ladies and gentlemen would be my dearly beloved husband. It's not even seven o'clock yet and he expects my pregnant brain to function at full capacity. Who does that? I mean I've heard of pregnancy brains before but I always believed that was just an excuse women used. Yeah, I fully take that back, all of it and its crumbs, I take it back. My third trimester just started and I'm ready to pop. Add buying a house, running a business, planning a wedding and a teething toddler to the mix and there is no greater disaster. And my dear husband is dead set on us buying a house so it can close before pull out arrives. Side note, I need to stop calling my baby pull out before it becomes his official nickname.

I pull the duvet over my head and turn the other way.

I'm tired and I need rest, plus it's a Saturday for God's sake. Even God himself rested on the seventh day because creating the world and all it holds is tiring. Now imagine not being able to sleep because this man wants a house. And I know I promised him when he was in his coma that I would live in that hideous house but I've had second thoughts about it. It ain't happening.

This man pulls the duvet away from me. I turn to look at him ready to fight, he is standing over me with his hands stuck on his waist. His shirt is off and he has a towel wrapped around his waist. He looks rather yummy. I feel my clit do a little dance.

"Stop smiling and pick a house. We are running out of time." As if houses are going extinct. I sigh and take the brochures and page through them. They are nice houses that's for sure but I dont see anything I like. I close one brochure and open another.

"Nothing?"

"Do we have to do this now kodwa Khuzwayo?" A smile creeps up on his face. Yep, I know the right buttons to press. He gets on the bed and sits next to

me.

"We need to get a house sthandwa sam. You see how busy Hlelo gets, she needs a garden to run around in and let all that energy out. And when the baby gets here we dont need to be stressing about moving and all that." Well he has a point. Since Hlelo started walking it's been a marathon around here running after her all the time. And the fact that she's always cooped up in the house most of the time is not helping.

"Fine. I'll pick a house today, but can I get five more minutes of sleep? Please?" He chuckles and gives me a kiss before getting off the bed and covering me with the duvet.

"Okay then. I'll take the terrorist to the farm so you can relax. I'm sure my parents would love to see her." One less thing to worry about.

"Works for me. Who knows, I might even book myself a few pamper sessions at the spa."

"As long as you pick a house today, you can do whatever you want." He walks away. I pull the duvet

up and drift back to sleep.

When I wake up the house is quiet. Perfect. Don't get me wrong I love my baby but if she is a terrorist now, imagine when she reaches the terrible twos. And by then I'll also have another one running around. But inspite of all that, my little blessings are the best thing I could have ever asked for.

I get off the bed and head to the bathroom. A spa is too much of a hustle, plus its saturday, I'm sure its packed by now. I fill the tub with warm water and some fragrance free bubbles. Any other day a glass of bubbly would be sitting pretty on the bathtub caddy but thanks to pull out, grape juice will have to do.

While the tub gets filled I head to the kitchen and get some grape juice, I take the whole cartoon and a champagne glass. I cant drink champagne but I can definitely pretend. I add some grapes on a bowl to finish off my session. Just as I'm about to head back to the bathroom I hear a knock on the door. I think of ignoring it but whoever it is, they are persistent. I open the door and come face to face with Joshua

senior. I dont remember giving him my address and I sure as hell don't remember telling security to let him up. Maybe Makhosi is right, it's time to move, the security around here is getting flimsy.

"Mr Joshua. To what do I owe the pleasure of this visit, on a Saturday?" I emphasize the Saturday part hoping he gets the message. This is not the time for him to be here.

"Can I come in?" Ever since Bahole told me about him probably being responsible for Wale's death I've grown a new kind of fear for him. Before it was a fear stemming from respect and admiration. But right now, it's the fear of what he could do to me if I ever crossed him.

I move away from the door and he walks in. His aura is scary right now but I need to know why he is here right at this very moment. He looks around my place and I know it's not the mega mansion he lives in but this is my home and I dont need him checking it out like it's some makeshift shelter.

"So what can I do for you sir?" He stops looking for

whatever it is that he is looking for and turns to me.

"I was hoping we could talk. About my son?" My heart right now is on overdrive. But I can't show him I'm scared of him right now.

"Can I get you something to drink?" He smiles and takes a seat on the single couch.

"No, thank you." I sit on the couch opposite him and look at him. "I know my visit is a bit of a surprise. But I wanted to check how you're coping without my son here to bother you?" I'm not sure if this is a trick question or he is trying to trap me into something. How do I even answer a question like that, especially about his own son.

"I'm not sure how I am supposed to feel honestly. A man is dead, brutally killed. I don't think anyone would feel easy about that."

"Even if it's one less thing to worry about?" I'm not sure what game this man is playing but I refuse to play right into his hands.

"No. Sure Wale did make life rather hectic for me but I wouldn't wish death on him. Inspite of his many

flaws and mistakes I'm sure deep down inside was a little boy just looking for attention." The look on his face tells me he is not getting what he came here for. Was he perhaps expecting me to pop champagne because his son is dead?

"That's profound. I thought you'd be celebrating." I chuckle. This man is truly up to no good, that much I know.

"I dont think I'll ever celebrate a life being cut short. In my honest opinion, Wale deserved to live and feel his punishment for his crimes." Shit. The water.

"Excuse me." I get up and quickly rush to the bathroom. The water was five seconds to spilling off of the tub. How would I even begin to deal with a flooded house.

I head back to the lounge. Lucky for me I am walking barefoot so Joshua can't hear me coming. I slowly approach the lounge and from the passage I can see the chair he was sitting on, but he is not on it. I stand behind the wall and peek in the lounge. I see him looking around as if he wants to hide something. I hear my great great grandmother whisper in my ear

telling me to take my phone out and record whatever this man is trying to do. Okay maybe it wasn't that clear but I've been apprehensive about this man's presence in my house since he walked in here. I take my phone out and record a video.

He keeps moving and placing things back in their place. He goes back to the couch and looks around, he lifts up the cushion and puts something in there. As soon as he is sure it's hidden he goes back to his seat. I retreat back to the hallway and then walk back to the lounge. This time I stomp my feet just a little bit so he knows I'm coming.

I get back to the lounge and see he is already good at this acting thing. He just hid something probably incriminating in some way and here he is acting like nothing. I take a seat on the same couch he was busy with just seconds ago.

"Sorry about that. I forgot I left the taps on in the bathroom." He chuckles and stands up. I stand up with him.

"Not a problem. I'm just happy you're doing okay. I

hate how difficult Wale made your life, and now that he is gone you can breathe easy."

"I guess. Thank you for checking up on me."

"No problem. Let me get going. Nigeria awaits." I walk him to the door and he opens it and walks out. He stands and turns to me again. I decide to speak before he says whatever he wants to say.

"I'm sorry I wont be able to make it to Wale's funeral. I would have loved to be there but my doctors dont want me flying right now." He smiles. He is a handsome man, even in his old age, but now his beauty is marred by the darkness he seems to carry that I never noticed before.

"I understand. Good day Miss Majola." He smiles and bows his head a bit before walking away.

I close the door and go back to the lounge. I lift up the cushion on the couch and to my surprise, there is a phone. I dont know why I left it there and I won't even bother trying to find out. And I'm also not touching that thing. I take my phone out of my gown pocket and call Detective Ngubane. It rings a few

times before he picks up.

"KaMajola. Sawubona. (Hello)"

"Hi. Unjani? (How are you?)"

"Kusaphileka sisi unjani wena? (I'm good how are you?)"

"I'm okay I guess. So I wanted to ask, how is Wale's murder investigation going?"

"Quite good actually. I think we are close to finding the person who put the hit out?"

"Oh, so it was a hit?"

"Oh most definitely. There is no way a person can be in a cell with one other person and they wake up dead with a slit throat with no proper explanation. This was definitely a hit. We questioned his cellmate and he is refusing to talk. But we did find a burner cellphone inside his mattress and the man received a call from a foreign number the night Wale died. It was a Nigerian number. Now we are tracing the call to see where in Nigeria it came from. We even questioned his father about it and he seems clueless."

For someone as powerful as him its quite weird that he is not doing everything in his power to get his sons killers to justice. My opinion, he knows something." I add one and one and I come up with two.

Everything makes sense now. This is why he felt the need to hide the phone here. He knows the cops have some clue on what happened to Wale and he is trying to divert the attention from him to me. And knowing the issues I've had with Wale it will be easy for the cops to pin the murder on me. And to make matters worse, the murder happened in my country, after Wale sent a threatening message to me. Now I'm beginning to think Joshua senior probably sent that message himself.

"Mbovu, I need to show you something. Can you come to my place now?"

"What is it?"

"I think it will be easier if I show you instead of telling you. I'll send you the address just now." I hear shuffling on his end and I can tell he is on his way.

"No problem. I'll be there in 20 minutes." I hang up the phone and send him my address. I call the security and tell them to let him in.

Twenty minutes has never been this long before. I'm pacing up and down the lounge I'm sure my Fitbit has recorded ten thousand steps from me just pacing. After a long time I hear a knock on the door. I open and Ngubane walks in with his partner behind him. They both turn to look at me almost in panic but mostly in anticipation of what I need to show them.

"The phone that ordered Wale's hit, I think I know where it might be." The two man look at each other and I can see excitement slowly rising in their eyes.

"Okay, tell us so we can nail the bastard who did this." Ngubane's partner says. I dont even know his name but right now it doesn't even matter. I lead them to the couch and pull up the cushion again. The phone is still in the same position Joshua senior left it in.

"KaMajola, whose phone is this?" Instead of giving him an answer I take out my phone and show him

the video i took earlier.

"I knew it." His partner shouts triumphantly. "I knew that son of a bitch was behind this." He takes out a pair of gloves from his pocket and puts them on his hands. He lifts the phone up and looks at it with a smile on his face.

"So he is trying to set you up!" Ngubane says still looking at the video.

"Clearly." His partner says. "I told you when we questioned him earlier he was so relaxed about this thing. I mean who is that relaxed about their son dying, brutally so unless you're the one behind it." Okay Ngubane's partner really can talk.

"Okay, I'm calling forensic to dust the place for Joshua's fingerprints, Phiri, put the phone down, we will let forensic deal with it. KaMajola, I'm going to need your phone. As evidence." The fuck is he on about? My life is on that phone, pictures, contacts, memories, I cant just let it go.

"No. That phone is important to me." I see hesitation in his eyes before he looks around the room.

"Where is your laptop? We can transfer all the sensitive information to your laptop, pictures, videos and all that."

"So what am I supposed to use to make calls?" I called him here to 'show' him something and not for him to take my stuff.

"I know it's an inconvenience but the NPA wont accept the video if you send it to me. They will need the phone." I sigh and go to the bedroom. I get my laptop off the bed and walk back to the lounge.

I plug my phone into the laptop and transfer all my files. I erase all the sensitive work documents before handing the phone over to him.

"I want it back." I tell him. He smiles and puts the phone in a see through bag written evidence on it. Just then there is a knock on the door. Phiri opens the door and a bunch of cops descend into my quiet apartment rummaging through my things like it's nothing.

Two hours later everyone walks out after forensics

has swept my house like I am a suspect. As scary as this moment is it makes me ease up a bit knowing that the truth will set me free. Right? Phiri and Ngubane say their goodbyes and I watch them leave with my phone. I immediately go into the online istore and order myself a new phone. Hopefully it will arrive soon.

When that's done I start cleaning and putting things back where they were. Makhosi and Hlelo walk in just as I am getting ready to start on dinner. My quiet Saturday turned out worse than I thought it would.

"I've been trying to call you the whole day. Why is your phone off?" Makhosi asks me. No hello no nothing. But then again I understand his worry.

"I'm sorry. I've had an eventful day." I walk to him and kiss Hlelo before she runs off to somewhere in the house.

"I'm listening." He takes a seat on the highchair as I prep the vegetables for the stew. I tell him everything.

"Why didnt you call me?" He asks looking at his fisted hands with his knuckles clenched and I can

tell he is upset.

"I dont know. Everything happened so fast I just wanted to atleast make sure Ngubane gets to Joshua before he leaves the country. You know if he leaves there wont be justice for Wale." His eyes shoot up and he looks at me.

"Why do you care what happens to Wale?"

"The man might have been a dick but he didnt deserve to die like that. And besides all that Joshua came here to set me up because he knew the cops were on his tail. So for me to not call the cops immediately would make me an accomplice or even worse, I'd be labeled a killer. The Joshua's are a pandemic yes, but I wasnt going to pay for a crime I didnt commit."

"Okay, okay." He gets up and wraps his arms around me from behind. "I'm sorry, I'm sure you were scared and you did what you needed to do. I just wish I could have been here to protect you."

"Remember when you told me I'm not superwoman? Well you're not superman either and some things

you cant protect me from and thats okay. I'm just happy that you're here now and I know you will always be here." I feel his lips on my shoulder.

"I'm glad to hear that. No lets go out to dinner. I'm sure you're too tired to even cook." I put the knife down and turn to look at him.

"I'll go get dressed." Be laughs and kisses me.

"Just like that?"

"Yep. I'm tired."

"Okay, I'll get Hlelo ready." I leave him and go to the bedroom. I put on a dress and some sandals and grab a bag and walk out. I find him with Hlelo on his lap eating some snacks.

"Okay let's go." I watch the two of them as they walk in front of me. I cant believe Joshua was trying to ruin all this. Whatever respect I had for him is dead and buried. The man is worse than corona.

THE PLAYERS GUIDE

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Unedited

I should be feeling free right now. But it's quite the opposite. Wale is dead, the cops have his father even though he is out on bail they have cops watching him 24/7 to make sure he doesn't run. And I have been told I will be a witness in his trial. I'm not certain what else they need me to say because they took my statement and they have the video of him planting evidence in my house. But I guess they need to have all their I's dotted and t's crossed to ensure he pays for his crimes.

I should be on maternity leave, well according to Makhosi but I am not ready yet. I still have some damage control to do. Obviously Joshua Industries and T.N.M Technologies parted ways a couple of weeks ago. I thought losing the contract would send all the other clients packing, especially the ones

Joshua recommended us to. But it seems God nedlozi are working overtime to protect me. I havent lost one client except Joshua.

Later today I have a meeting with the last client from Ghana, I need to ascertain whether he is still on board or not. And lucky for me he is in the country. I'm not sure why but he is here and he has agreed to meet. I finish my last meeting with Khwezi and head to the hotel where I'm meeting with him. I find him in the restaurant concluding another meeting. I wait by the bar till he is done before going to his table. He smiles and stands up when he sees me. Weird, I thought he'd be standoffish since he has been ignoring my calls for a while now. He extends his hand for a handshake. I take it.

"Miss Majola, it's nice to see you again." He pulls out the chair for me to sit.

"Its nice to see you too. I've been trying to get hold of you for a while now." He sits down.

"I know. I apologize for not getting back to you."

"Apology accepted." He chuckles and calls the waiter

over.

"Would you like something to drink?"

"I'd like a glass of wine but juice will do." He laughs and gives my order to the waiter before turning back to me.

"So, Miss Majola, what can I do for you?" He asks, his fingers tapping on the table. I should start correcting people when they call me Miss Majola. I am Mrs Khuzwayo.

"Well, I'm sure you've heard about the recent developments with Joshua Industries Mr Mensah, I just want to know if that has changed your perception of us?" The waiter places my juice in front of me accompanied by the menu.

"Miss Majola, your work is impeccable. Your team, one of the hardest working team I know. My perception of you and your work will not change because of what Joshua and his brat of a son do. Relax. Our contract still stands." I let out a deep sigh. All my clients are still on board. Joshua didn't win. But I still have questions for Mensah.

"Thank you. I'm glad to hear that. I have questions though."

"Shoot." I take a sip of the juice while he stares at me.

"You and Mr Joshua are friends, are you here to support him?" He smiles.

"Not even close. I am here on business. Truth is Joshua doesn't have that many friends. Besides raising a spoilt brat he made sure to sweep all Wale's dirt under the carpet, even when his dirt was too close to home." His look suddenly becomes sadder. The smile he had on his lips a few seconds ago disappears and he looks down at his hands on his lap.

"What do you mean close to home?" He sighs and looks up at me, his face now covered with sadness.

"Wale raped my daughter a few years ago. Of course when I found out I tried to get justice for her. But Joshua had a reach with people in all types of places. Every door I knocked on no one could help me. Wale gave my daughter a twenty thousand dollars check

to get her to stop pursuing the matter. They claim she took the money, spent it and then killed herself leaving a note saying she lied about the rape."

"Oh wow, I'm so sorry. Did you believe her when she said she lied?" He shakes his head.

"No. But everyone else did. Somehow I think Wale had something to do with her death. My daughter was so determined to bring Wale to justice, she was willing go fight for her life. The two of them went to university together so my daughter had a lot of posters printed calling him a rapist and then pasted them all over the university." He chuckles. "She was one rebellious girl and a fighter too. So I dont believe she killed herself. A few years after that I met Joshua again and he said we should bury the hatchet blah bloody blah and I let him think i was over everything but i wasnt. I've been silently plotting my revenge for a while now, and it's all coming together." He wiggles his fingers while tapping them together like a villain in a movie.

"What revenge are you talking about exactly?" He smiles and sips his whiskey.

"Let's just say I'm not the only person Wale has messed with. And now that he is dead the only person who will pay for his sins is his father. You know how they say 'sins of the father will fall on the son', well in this case, the sins of the son will fall on the father." I'm still trying to figure out if I should be impressed or afraid. These old men have more drama than Makhosi's slay queens combined.

The drive back home is short from here. I should be there in less than 30 minutes. I figure I should drive through Morningside. While I'm driving I see a for sale sign outside this huge house. I park by the gate and get out of the car. I peek through the gate and the house really is huge. And it's got a huge yard. The gates open scaring the shit out of me. A car drives towards the gate. I'm not sure who it is but I'm sure they can tell me more about the house, if they have time.

The car parks and a lady gets out. She's beautiful and she looks impeccable. Her heels click on the concrete as she walks to me.

"Tivikele Majola, or should I say Tivikele Khuzwayo?"

She says with a smile on her face. She knows me. That's both impressive and scary.

"You know me?" She extends her hand and I take it. We shake hands.

"I make it my business to know any female business people around Joburg. My name is Sphesihle Zungu, Manzini properties."

"Oh nice to meet you. I saw the for sale sign so I thought I should peek in and see what's going on."

"Are you in the market for a house?"

"Yep. I think with two kids, our apartment will be a bit too crowded so we will need some space." If her smile could get any wider I'm sure it would. Right now the edges of her lips are getting rid to kiss her ears.

"Well you've come to the right place. Come in and let me show you around."

"Oh no, I will make an appointment, I'm sure you're busy."

"Dont be silly. I'm here, you're here, the house is here."

We might as well look at it and see if you like it.

"Okay then." We get into our cars. I drive in while she reverses back to the house. When both our cars are in she closes the gate.

I park my car close enough to the front door. We walk in as she tells me all about the house.

"It's a five bedroom, four and a half bathroom house, it has a parking that's enough for atleast 13 cars. It's got a huge yard and a pool out back. It's a perfect family home." She's not lying. The house is beautiful. When the tour is done she hands me her card. I promise to call her as soon as I've spoke to my husband. Yep, I'm that girl now that husbands people to death. That's me alright.

When I get home I find my husband shirtless in the kitchen with just an apron on. He looks yummy. I sit on the highchair and watch him move around the kitchen. I take out my phone and snap a few pictures. He turns around when he hears the camera shutter.

"That's called stalking." He says laughing. He comes over to me and gives me a kiss.

"Atleast I'm not a dangerous stalker." He laughs and goes back to his cooking. "So I think I might have found a house for us."

"Yeah, it's in Morningside. Huge and beautiful. I think you'll love it. I'll arrange a viewing then we can go see it."

"Perfect. You'll tell me when and I'll be ready."

"Good. I cant wait."

NARRATED

He is not like all the other cops, fine was he'd probably be running his own station right now, or better yet he'd be a premier or provincial head of policing, but unlike most of the cops who want to climb the ladder, Ngubane only wanted one thing, to bring perpetrators to book.

He sits in his office looking at the huge chart in front of him, its everything he has worked on to bring Joshua to justice. Wale's case was one that got him a bit of recognition. Now he knows everyone is watching him so he can't fuck this up.

Phiri walks in with two takeaway coffees and hands one to his partner.

"What are you thinking about?" He asks him.

"Nothing much. Everything is ready for the trial. I hope the prosecutor knows what he is doing."

"Of course he does. You know it." Just then the prosecutor walks in and takes a seat.

"Gentlemen, I'm glad I found you." He says looking at the two men.

"What's the problem?"

"Joshua's defence is claiming he was set up."

"By who?" Both men ask in unison.

"Mabutho Majola." The men look at each other not sure what to make of all this new information.

"I dont understand!" Ngubane says.

"Apparently Mabutho was in Nigeria the night Wale died." The prosecutor tells them.

"Well yes, he is a private pilot and he has piloted Joshua's private jet. Even when Joshua came here the day after Wale's death Mabutho was piloting his jet." Ngubane tells him.

"Well Joshua says the phone belongs to Mabutho and he is the one who ordered a hit on his son."

"He cant be serious. Why would Mabutho do that?" Phiri asks

"To protect his sister obviously. Look, I know the man is innocent and the defence is trying to shift the blame to another innocent man. So do me a favour, find me irrefutable proof that Mabutho is innocent, otherwise we might end up sending an innocent man to jail." He announces before taking his phone and car keys and walks out.

"The trial starts in a couple of weeks." Phiri tells his partner.

"I know. Let's get to work."

THE PLAYERS GUIDE

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Unedited

The police station is buzzing as media is camped outside waiting to get a glimpse of Mabutho who was dragged out of a clients plane at OR Tambo three hours ago on suspicion of killing Adebowale Joshua. Reporters and photographers are waiting patiently to hear from the station commander why the young man was brought in for questioning when just a couple of days ago the world was expecting Olu Joshua to stand trial for the murder of his son, but now, doubts and questions linger in the air.

Inside the police station, Mabutho has been put in a cold interrogation room with just one light coming from the dimly lit lamp and the small window with steel bars on it. Mabutho is suffocating, scared and

unsure of what him being here means. As protective as he is of his sister he has never crossed the line when it comes to the law, well except when he signed off on a bogus company sale that landed Wale behind bars, other than that, even a traffic fine is a rare occurrence for him.

He tries to stand up from the chair to stretch his legs but the handcuffs and shackles on his legs, that are held in place by a tiny yet strong bolt that has been deeply buried in the floor remind him that at this very moment, he is a prisoner. He bows his head as he remembers what his mother told him to do when he feels overwhelmed or scared. Pray. That's all he can do right now. His lips move but no sound leaves his lips, his heart on the other hand is as loud as a stadium when a team scores in a final.

The door opens while he is in the middle of his prayer, scared as he is, he continues praying till he feels someone's heavy presence towering over him.

He pauses his prayer, he knows he can't end it just yet, the heavy presence that has engulfed him tells him he should be very scared of what might come. He lifts his head up, his heart racing and looks at the man who just a few months ago he was working with to bring Wale down, and now he is here, interrogating him like he is some known criminal.

The man takes a seat while his partner half sits on the edge of the table. He takes out a tape recorder and presses a button before switching it on.

"This is Detective Sboniso Ngubane, together with my partner Detective Elias Phiri. The time is 16:25 on the 28th of August 2020. We are in interrogation room B to question Mabutho Majola who is a suspect in the murder of one Adebawale Joshua." He places the tape recorder on the table after talking on it close to his mouth. He opens his docket and looks at Mabutho. "Please confirm that your name is Mabutho Majola." Mabutho looks at him and says nothing. He might just be a pilot but he knows the basics of law, he does afterall binge on law and

order every chance he gets, and he knows the first thing a suspect will ask for is a lawyer. In his case however, even though he hasn't spoken to any of his siblings he knows that they have heard the news of his arrest and they are organizing a lawyer right now.

"Mr Majola, you have to talk to us eventually, you can't stay silent forever." Detective Phiri tells him. Mabutho looks at the man trying to intimidate him and he chuckles. He might be shitting himself inside but on the outside, he is not about to let them see they got under his skin. He takes his eyes off of the man and looks at his handcuffed hands instead.

"Mabutho?" Ngubane calls his name and gets no reply. Phiri gets off the table and bangs on it loud enough for Mabutho to bring his head up again.

"My bra, we don't have all day."

Just then the door opens and an older gentlemen in a suit walks in. His suit is impeccable to say the least, you can tell that even though he is slowly

joining the silver fox gang, he is still as handsome as he was ten years ago, maybe even more handsome now.

"Gentlemen. I know you weren't just interrogating my client without me. You wouldn't do that now would you gentlemen?" The two men stand up and exit the room. The man sits on the chair that Ngubane has just left and looks at his client. "Are you good?" He asks Mabutho. Mabutho shows him his shackled hands and feet and shrugs. The man stands up and walks to the door and calls back the two detectives. They reluctantly turn around in the hallway and look at the man.

"What?" Phiri asks, irritation and anger masking his face.

"Is my client under arrest?" The two men look at each other.

"No, he is here for questioning." Ngubane tells him.

"Then explain to me why he is cuffed like an animal? Or better yet, dont explain, you'll explain to a judge when I use the department for false imprisonment, torture and abuse." He walks back into the room, takes his phone out and snaps pictures of Mabutho. The two detectives walk in right after him. They look at each other before uncuffing Mabutho.

"Stop doing that?" Phiri says.

"Doing what? Collecting evidence?" The man asks. The two men walk out with the shackles leaving Mabutho with the man. The man takes a seat again. "My apologies, before we even go any further, my name is Khanya Radebe, I'll be your lawyer." Mabutho's eyes shoot wide open. He knows this man, well he has heard about him, and he also knows as monied as his family is, Khanya Radebe doesn't come cheap. In order for him to even free up his schedule at such short notice he is sure there was a hefty deposit put down.

"Wow, so you aren't just a myth, you are real?"
Mabutho says making Khanya chuckle.

"Well I'm as real as it gets. So tell me, is there any truth to what they are saying?"

"No."

"Are you sure? If I'm going to defend you I need you to tell me the truth like you're standing before God and narrating all your sins on earth. I need you to be honest with me." Mabutho nods his head. Khanya takes out a notebook and pen from his briefcase.
"Okay, tell me what happened?" Mabutho clears his throat and opens his mouth.

"Well, I was in Nigeria a few weeks back when I got a text from my brother Bahole telling me that my sister had got a text from someone telling her that 'revenge is a dish best cold' or something along those lines. Our first suspect was Wale since he had made it his mission in life to torture my sister just because she refused to work with him. I decided to speak to his father about it cause I was staying over

at his place. He told me he would sort everything out. I took it he was going to bring Wale back to the straight and narrow. Sometime before I went to sleep I decided to go get a glass of water, Joshua was in his office, I heard him talk to someone on the phone and tell them it was time to put an end to it. I dont know what it was but the next day i woke up to a text from my brother telling me that Wale was dead and he had been killed in his sleep. That's all I know." Khanya keeps writing in his notebook, when he is done he looks up at Mabutho.

"I understand the cops traced the last call to the prisoner who confessed to killing Wale and it came from Nigeria, the same night you were there. And that's basically the basis of their case. Now it might be hard to prove that the phone wasn't yours."

"You mean the same phone that Joshua tried to set my sister up with when he tried to hide it at her place? If she hadn't had the foresight to record him while he was there hiding the phone then she would be the one sitting in this seat right now." Khanya's eyes

light up.

"Okay, this is better than I thought. Getting you off should be easy. Tell me, did your sister invite him to her place?"

"No. He just showed up on her doorstep saying he was there to check up on her, next thing she knows he is hiding things in her couch."

"Where does she live?"

"The Bay Estate."

"That place is one of the most secure places in Joburg. Getting in there isn't supposed to be easy. Did she perhaps give him her code?" Mabutho shakes his head. "Perfect. Now we first need to figure out how he got in there. That alone is trespassing, especially since he wasn't invited."

"Okay that's cool and all but when am I going home?"

"Well now that I know the gist of everything I can call the Detectives in. Say nothing unless I tell you to speak. Are we clear?" Mabutho nods his head and sits back on the chair as Khanya stands up to call

the detectives. A minute or so later the three of them show up. Khanya takes the only empty seat in the room and sits down leaving both Detectives standing.

"Okay then, let's begin." Ngubane says putting the tape recorder back on the table.

"Before we begin, please sit down, the least you can do is afford us some level of respect by not talking to us whole standing up." Khanya tells them. The two look at each other and Phiri clenches his jaws and walks out following Ngubane's silent command. He comes back with two chairs and the two men sit down. "Thank you, now we can begin."

"Okay, so Mr Majola, let's talk about the night you were in Nigeria. You got a text from your brother telling you someone was sending threatening messages to your sister, the next morning the man you suspected to be behind those same threats wakes up dead. How does that happen?"

Mabutho opens his mouth to answer him instead
Khanya cuts him off.

"Firstly, how does one wake up dead?"

"You know exactly what we mean?" Phiri spits back
with clenched teeth. Khanya chuckles.

"English never loved us my brother. Anyways
continue."

"Please answer the question Mr Majola." Mabutho
looks at Khanya who nods giving him the go ahead.

"I dont know how he woke up dead as you say it.
When I got the text from my brother I told Mr Joshua
about it and he assured me he would take care of it.
The next morning I woke up to another text from my
brother saying Wale is dead."

"Did you say any point suspect his father?"

"Yes, I mean who loses a son and then acts like
nothing happened. The man couldn't even shed one
tear for his son, he was drinking whiskey like he had
just won the lottery."

"And you didnt think to report this?" Phiri asks him.

"To who? With what proof?"

"It's our job to find proof." Ngubane tells him.

"Well you have proof, everything you have points to Joshua yet we are here and you're interrogating my client based on hearsay from the same man accused of killing his own son." Khanya says.

"Look, personally I don't think Mabutho had anything to do with Wale's death. But we can't ignore that the phonecall that ordered Wale's death came from Nigeria and Mabutho was in Nigeria at the time."

"Detective, all you have is circumstantial evidence at most, and that's just a polite way of saying all you have is gossip and hearsay. Now, if you don't mind." He pushes the chair back and stands up. "I am taking my client home." Mabutho stands up and follows Khanya out.

"We will be in touch Mr Majola." Phiri shouts at the men.

At the front desk Mabutho collects his belongings while Khanya makes a phonecall. As soon as he is done he turns to Mabutho.

"We are going to leave through the back. Unless you want to be on the front pages."

"No, I just need a hot bath and some sleep."

"Cool. I'll take you to your sisters."

"No, I'd rather go to my place. I'll get an uber."

"Well I've been given strict orders to bring you to the Bay estate so that's where we are going. Let's go."

He leads him to the back of the police station and into an SUV with tinted windows. They get in and drive to Fourways.

Khanya punches in the code Tivikele gave him and security alerts her that they are here. Meanwhile in her apartment she is pacing up and down the lounge. Makhosi is trying to get a restless Hlelo to sleep. After a few minutes Mabutho and Khanya knock on

the door. She quickly runs to the door and throws herself at her brother as soon as she sees his face. The hug is uncomfortable, not because of them but because of the bump standing between them. Khanya walks past them and into the house. Tivikele pulls back and looks at her brother, cupping his face in her hands.

"Are you Okay? They didnt hurt you did they?" He puts on a gentle smile, even though this whole experience freaked him out he knows how stressed his sister will be if he tells her he is scared, she already blames herself for him going to jail, even if it was for a few hours.

"I'm fine sis wami. You need to relax, I dont want you going into early labour." They walk into the house. Makhosi fist bumps Mabutho before sitting down. He takes Hlelo into his arms and before long she is out like a light.

"So how did it go? Tell me everything, I'm sorry I

couldnt be there. Someone would not allow me to go." She says giving Makhosi a attitude.

"I'm glad he did. You're pregnant Tivikele you cant be going in and out of police stations." Her brother tells her. She rolls her eyes and turns to Khanya.

"So what do you think? Will this become a serious case?" Tivikele asks Khanya.

"I doubt it. All they have at best is circumstantial evidence, nothing concrete. And anything they say will be easy to dispute."

"That's great. I need to call the parents and update them."

"While you do that, let me get going I have a client I need to see." Khanya gets up and walks to the door with Tivikele behind him.

"Thank you so much Mr Radebe." Tivikele tells him.

"Anytime, listen, relax, my guess is Joshua is using Mabutho to keep the cops busy while he escapes."

"You think he might risk it?" He shrugs his shoulders.

"The evidence points to him, plus with the killers confession, he is going away for life, that's if he doesn't escape. Anyways, take care." He walks out of the door.

Tivikele heads back to the lounge and sits down next to her brother and hugs him again.

"You know the way you're carrying on you'd think I was at a maximum prison."

"Dont joke about this. This is serious Mabutho." He laughs and pulls out of the hug.

"Relax, it will be over soon. Besides, like Khanya said, all they have is circumstantial evidence and nothing more."

"I guess."

"Your parents just landed at the airport." Makhosi says bringing the two siblings heads up to look at him. "Let me go pick them up."

"No I'll do it." Mabutho says.

"I dont mind. Besides you need a bit of rest after your little ordeal. I'll go." Makhosi stands up and kisses Tivikele then takes his keys and walks out.

"So tell me how you got the Khanya Radebe at such short notice?" Mabutho asks his sister after putting Hlelo down and following her to the kitchen.

"It took some convincing."

"You mean you had to pay him a lot of money to get him to come on board? I know that man charges an arm and a leg." Tivikele sighs and stops taking out the vegetables and looks at her brother.

"It's my fault you're in this mess so I will do whatever it takes to get you out."

"Stop saying its your fault. You and I both know Wale was never going to stop bothering you, and even though I didnt do anything to him it's still good riddance. And you'll have to tell me how much you paid Radebe so I can pay you back."

Tivikele rolls her eyes and says okay and continues

with her cooking.

Meanwhile at the Beit Bridge border gate, a truck carrying tonnes of hay makes it's way past the immigration officers. They inspect its contents and make sure the drivers papers and his load are up to standard. As soon as they are satisfied they let him go. The truck drives into Zimbabwe without much suspicion. Two hours into the drive the truck comes to a stop. The driver goes to the back and goes through his load, inside one huge roll of hay in the middle of the truck he pulls out a man who has been stuck in there for about six hours. The man sits on side of the road trying to allow more blood to flow to his sleeping legs. After a few minutes he stands up and stretches.

"This is as far as I can take you man." The driver says. He man takes an envelope out of his small backpack and hands it to the driver.

"Thank you my brother, I'll figure out something.

Thank you."

"Just so we are clear, Mr Joshua if you get caught, I dont know you and you dont know me."

"Works for me. Thank you. I'll find my way from here." The driver gets into his truck after securing his load again and drives off leaving the lone man standing by the side of the road.

THE PLAYERS GUIDE

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Unedited

I love it when my family is together. It's crazy and messy but I love it. It's barely seven o'clock and I know mum is already in the kitchen preparing breakfast. As if she read my mind my phone rings on the pedestal. I take it and her name flashes on the screen. I want to laugh but I know she's about to shout at me for sleeping this late. Apparently no married woman sleeps this late. Well this married woman is pregnant and stressed so she will stay in bed.

"Answer the phone." Makhosi says next to me. I guess the ringing woke him up.

"No." I whisper. For all I know mum could be standing outside the door. Makhosi quickly turns

around to stare at me with his sexy sleepy eyes.

"What?" He asks with a frown on his face. The ringing stops and within seconds it starts again. I show him who is calling and a smile creeps up on his face. "Why is she calling you when she's right inside the house?"

"She probably wants to ask me why I'm sleeping when I should be preparing breakfast for my husband." He chuckles and lays on his back.

"She wouldn't do that. Would she?" This one still has a whole entire lifetime to learn that his mother in law is a savage. He should know by now but maybe he is slow. Or maybe its cause mum likes him so she spoils him.

"If I answer this phone and she says that then you owe me a thousand rands." He turns to his side and leans on his arm.

"Okay. And if she doesn't, what do I get?" A naughty smile covers his face. The phone stops ringing but I know it will ring again soon. Mrs Majola doesn't give

up.

"What do you want?"

"Morning glory." Trust Makhosi Khuzwayo to think about sex even early in the morning. But then again this baby has sent my libido on a downward spiral. Quite ironic really that with Hlelo I was alone and hornier than a dog on heat, and now I have a man available 24/7 but my libido is missing in action.

"Fine. If she calls again and says anything other than why I'm still sleeping then you get your morning glory." I know that shit ain't happening. I know my mother better than he does.

As if on cue the phone rings again and this time my dad's name flashes on the screen. I show him before sliding the green button and putting the call on loudspeaker.

"Baba."

"It's me, why are you not picking up my calls?" I yawn as if I just woke up.

"I didn't hear the phone ring. What's going on?"

"Security just called, Mabutho's lawyer is on his way up."

"Okay, I'm coming." She hangs up.

"So do we do it now or after finding out what Khanya has to say?" He asks with a smirk on his face and a look filled with lust. The universe never loved me.

You'd think Khanya was here to announce a death or something. Everyone is in the lounge still in gowns and pyjamas. Mum opens the door and Khanya walks in wearing a tailored suit. For an old man he sure looks good.

"Sanibonani. (Hello.)" He greets and takes a seat.

"I'm sorry for waking you up so early in the morning but I got a call from Detective Ngubane, they have an update on the case so they are on their way here."

He tells us.

"What do you think they have to say?" Dad asks.

"Beats me. But let's hope it's good news." He answers looking at his watch. Just then security calls saying the police are at the gate. I tell them to let them up.

It takes less than five minutes to get from the gate to the apartment. Unless there is load shedding and we have to use the stairs but today it's all clear. My heart beats out of control, I dont want anything to happen to my brother, and I'd hate for him to go go prison for something he didn't do. Joshua has proven himself to be a piece of shit and now he is determined to take my family down with him. All along I thought Wale was the curse but now its clear where he got his terrorizing spirit from. I look at Mabutho and he is tapping his fingers on the armrest of the chair. He is nervous too. I hate that I brought this mess into my family. Maybe if I had just agreed to Wale's proposal the first time we met then

we wouldnt be here right now.

The police seem to take forever to get here. But eventually a loud knock on the door announces their arrival. Bahole who is closest to the door opens for them. They walk in and when they see the army waiting for them their steps falter, almost in fear. But I guess they suck it up and move close. Since there are no chairs available for them to sit they have no choice but to stand.

"We dont have all day." Khanya says tapping his watch. Phiri looks at him and a flash of anger crosses his face. Ngubane on the other hand seems, neutral, if there is even such a thing. His face is unreadable.

"Uhm we actually wanted to let Mr Majola know that the investigation into his involvement in Mr Joshua's death is being put to rest. We apologize for any inconvenience caused."

"Any inconvenience caused? Are you serious?"

Khanya says. "Why?"

"Excuse me?" I guess this is the part we were supposed to jump for joy but Khanya seems to be aiming for the jugular. I guess that's why he is so expensive.

"Tell me why you decided to drop the investigation? Yesterday you were dead set on pinning this on my client and today you're dishing out apologies. What happened?"

"Look it doesn't matter....." Phiri starts but Khanya cuts him off.

"Khuluma Ngubane. (Talk.)" I see Phiri clench his jaw and curl his fingers into a fist before they disappear into his pockets.

"Well, Joshua senior escaped last night. We believe he might be in Mozambique or Zimbabwe." Khanya bursts out laughing. I guess he was right when he said Joshua was probably using this whole situation to escape.

"So you let him play you? You had all the evidence against him, a confession, the phone used to make the whole thing happen, literally you had everything, and because of you let him play you, you took your eyes off of him and now he is gone. So tell me, how long should I wait before I file the wrongful arrest lawsuit, oh and just so you know I'll be adding loss of income on it too." I told you Khanya was asking for the jugular.

After being tongue tied for a minute and Khanya raining on them like a flood Ngubane and Phiri walk out of the house looking like they are carrying the world's problems on their shoulders.

"Okay, I should get going too." Khanya says and picks up his briefcase.

"Can we atleast make you breakfast?" Mum asks. Khanya smiles and looks at his watch.

"Maybe next time. I'll be in touch." Bahole walks him out and we all let out sighs of relief. Even though it

seems like it's all over now I cant help wondering if it really is over. Clearly Joshua is more cunning than I thought he was.

"Are you Okay?" Makhosi asks. I didn't even realize I was lost in my own thoughts for a moment. I look at him and smile.

"I'm fine. Just tired."

"Oh baby go and rest, I'll bring you breakfast in bed." Mum says. Okay maybe I was wrong about her savagery. I thought by now she'd have me slaving away in the kitchen.

"I'm tired too. I think I'm going to sleep a bit." Gcinile says pretending to yawn.

"And who do you think is going to make breakfast with me?"

"Wait so she gets to sleep in but I have to make breakfast? Where is the fairness in that?"

"Are you pregnant?" Mum asks her.

"Oh, so in order for me to sleep in I need to be

pregnant? Got it!" She should have joined the EFF, I'm sure her reasoning skills are needed there.

While Gcinile sulks all the way to the kitchen I head to the bedroom.

"You owe me." Makhosi whispers in my ear just as I step into the bedroom. I hear the key lock. This is really happening. He wraps his arm around my shoulders and kisses my neck. "Are you sure you're okay? You don't look it." I sigh and close my eyes resting my head on his chest.

"What if Joshua is not done yet? What if he comes back to finish what he started?"

"I dont think he will. Think about it, his case is a high profile one. If he shows his face here again it will be the last thing he ever does. So you need to relax." Maybe he is right, I need to relax and have faith that Joshua is really gone. For good.

"I guess." I turn around to look at him as he wraps

his arms around my ever expanding waist. "So, when do you want your price?"

"How about now?" Good thing Hlelo slept with her grandparents. He brings his head close to mine and our lips meet. He plants a few kisses before my lips part and he takes them fully into his. I take slow steady steps backwards till the back of my knees hit the bed. I slowly lower myself on to the bed as he breaks the kiss and pulls up his tshirt.

I pull myself up on the bed as he follows. With his knees resting on either side of me.

"You know we dont have to do this right? I know you haven't been feeling up to it lately and thats Okay. You dont have to do this to make me happy." I hold his head and pull it down and kiss him. His one hand goes to my gown and pulls the knot apart. His hand goes under my pyjama top and for the first time in a while I feel my clit throbbing. It's a welcome sensation really.

He breaks the kiss and sits up. He helps me take off my gown and pulls my pants down. I guess now it makes sense why they say married women should sleep naked. It's too much work taking everything off right now. When I'm stark naked under him he comes back to kiss me again. He goes from kissing my lips down to my neck while his hands roam all over my body. He goes further down and parts my legs. Before I know it his tongue is sucking on my clit. I take a pillow and put it over my face trying to muff the sounds of my moans. I feel his tongue circling around my opening.

His tongue is then replaced by his fingers making me arch my back. While his tongue dances on my clit and his fingers moving in and out of me I thank heavens for the pillow that's muffling my moans. With every stroke of his tongue I feel myself getting closer to an orgasm. His fingers go in faster and steadily pulling out an orgasm.

When the sensation dies down I take the pillow off my face and try to catch my breath. He pulls his fingers out of me and he sucks on them.

"You taste sweet." I chuckle as he comes up and gives me a kiss. Ben is right. I do taste sweet.

"You're a freak you know that." I say between kisses. I feel his dick rubbing up on me. I reach down between us and take his dick in my hand. I run my hand up and down on it a few times before directing it to my opening. He slowly pushes himself in. He pulls himself up and kneels between my open legs. With my legs and butt lifted up and resting on his knees he thrusts into me slowly and carefully touching all the walls inside me. His thrusts get deeper and quicker. With each stroke it gets harder to keep my moans contained.

A soft knock comes through and for a split second he stops and looks at me. His lips curve into a sly smile.

"Who is it?" I ask as he begins his strokes again.

"It's me. I have your breakfast." Gcinile shouts from the other side of the door.

"I'll be out in a minute."

"Arent you supposed to be having breakfast in bed your highness?" I can mentally see her rolling her eyes right now.

"Unless you want to come in and see Makhosi naked, I'll open for you "

"Eew, no." I hear footsteps moving away from the door and this one is still pounding into me like theres no tomorrow.

He pulls out and flips me over. I lay with my chest on the bed and my ass up in the air. I cling on to the bed as he pounds their out of me. I'm pretty sure right now he is trying to make up for the past few weeks when he wasnt getting any. He keeps going till I feel an orgasm build up again. A few more strokes and my walls come crumbling down around me but he doesnt stop. He keeps going till I feel his warm seed spill into me. Good thing I'm pregnant already

otherwise that would have definitely fertilized an egg.

He pulls out and we lay on the bed trying to catch our breath.

"Breakfast is getting cold." He says in between breaths.

"Let's go take a shower." He gets off the bed then helps me up. We head to the bathroom and take our shower. When we're done we get dressed and go out to the lounge. My dad and brothers are sitting on the dining table having their breakfast with the TV on behind them. Makhosi joins them while I go to the kitchen to join my mum and sister.

"So what happened to breakfast in bed?" Mum asks looking at me like she knows things she shouldn't know.

"I had breakfast in bed."

"I told you." Gcinile says and we laugh.

"I thought you were tired."

"I am. Somehow. I guess the whole thing with Joshua and Mabutho just got me stressed out. I just hope he is really gone for good."

"We can only hope. Eat. I dont want you starving my grandbaby." I take the plate in front of me and eat.

"Come look at this." Bahole calls us. We all rush to the lounge. He unmutes the TV and the journalist reads the news.

"Breaking news, Mr Olu Joshua, the man accused of putting out a hit on his son a few weeks ago and was set to stand trial for the murder in just a few days has been found dead on the border separating Mozambique and Zimbabwe. Authority's in both countries believe the man fell into the trap of robbers while he was trying to cross into Mozambique in the middle of the night after escaping from South Africa. He was found with four stab wounds. His belongings, except his passport and drivers license are believed to have been taken

by the robbers. It's not clear what the NPA's way forward will be seeing as just yesterday a man was brought in for questioning in the case, but with no evidence against him, the NPA might just put the case to rest. In other news....." Bahole mutes the TV again and we all stand there looking at it.

"So it's over?" Gcinile asks, breaking the silence.

"Yep. It's all over." Dad says.

"Okay let's pop the champagne." Mum says. We break out in laughter as she dances her way back to the kitchen. I stand in the same spot as everyone joins her in the kitchen with glasses ready for a toast. I'm not sure who or what is at play in the universe right now but I'm glad it's there. My brother can rest easy now and maybe my stress can rest too. Even though this is not how I saw him paying for his crimes, I'm glad he is out of our lives. For good this time. It's a pity he had to die for me to get some peace of mind.

THE PLAYERS GUIDE

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Unedited

I've never been the girl that dreams of her wedding or the whole happily ever after fairytale, I've never had an idea of what kind of wedding dress I wanted to wear, even if I did, it would not be the whole Princess ballgown dress. But things change right, well not entirely, the Princess ballgown is still off limits. Even though right at this moment I am in one prancing around because my mother wants to see me in one.

"It looks so beautiful on you baby. You look like a real life princess." Says my mother while wiping away a couple of tear drops. Pity this will always be a dream for her, unless of course Gcinile decides to indulge her and get one for her wedding. I turn to the

floor length mirror behind me and look at myself. The dress is flattering. The sparkly bodice with a lot of Pearl's and Swarovski crystals perfectly hides my postpartum belly. It's not that big but it's still there. And for some reason it's been a source of insecurity for me. Now I really need that gym membership.

"Okay I'm ready for the next dress." I say turning around to face my entourage. And that would be my mother, my mother in law, my bridesmaids, Thobi, Simz, Pinky, Gcinile, Philasande, Kuhle. and Busi. Yes I have a truckload of bridesmaids. I couldnt decide who to put in and who to eliminate. Three more of my cousins will be joining the party soon. So in total I have ten bridesmaids. Makhosi has enough friends and brothers to fill the quota so he will be just fine.

"Let's try another ballgown, pretty please." If my mom thinks I'll end up in a ballgown then she is sadly mistaken. I have three weeks to find a dress. In two weeks my traditional wedding is happening and

the next week it's the white wedding. Although according to Home Affairs I am Mrs Tivikele Nomzamo Khuzwayo, well Makhosi insisted on it because he didn't want his son being born out of wedlock. I don't know how that would make pull out any less of a Khuzwayo butni figured to avoid a fight and resentment later let's just sign and give the man what he wants. And three days after that Pull out, actually his name is AMakhos'ayabusa Anothe Khuzwayo Junior. Although the A is silent so Makhosi has his namesake. And to say he is overjoyed would be an understatement.

The consultant leads me back to the dressing room where there are a few more dresses hanging on the rail. And of course, as per my dear mother's request, she puts me in a ballgown. This one has a sweetheart neckline and a belt with diamante details. It's almost perfect but I'm still not sure about it.

"You look beautiful." The consultant says looking at me through the mirror.

"Thank you. Are my boobs not too big? I feel like they will fall over." She chuckles and pulls the dress up around the boobs. Yeah maybe I shouldn't have done this three months after giving birth when my boobs look like cow udders.

"We can always put in some straps just to pull the babies up." She says.

"That could work. If I choose it." She helps me and we walk out to the waiting entourage and of course there are oohs and aahs all around. Its hit with them but not with me. I still want my mermaid dress and if I have to wear five spanx to flatten this tummy then so be it. Beauty is struggle right? I head back to the dressing room and put my mermaid dress on. It's a simple mermaid gown with an off shoulder neckline with a bit of a sweetheart neckline. It has a single band of diamante details on the neckline and where the fluffy tulle meets the hem of the dress. A silk belt with a single crystal buckle in the center finishes off the look. It's perfect. I walk out to show everyone and they love it. I go back to the dressing room and

my phone rings again. It's a video call, I've been ignoring it for a while now, Makhosi is just nosy and he wants to see the dress. I pick up as the consultant walks out giving me some privacy.

"Finally. I've been trying to get hold of you." He says it like he doesn't know where I am.

"I know and I've been ignoring you. What do you want Bab'Khuzwayo?" He smiles, if he was any lighter he'd be red from all the blushing. This man is really not much of a mystery. Call him Bab'Khuzwayo once and he melts like the icebergs in the Arctic.

"I miss you, come home."

"Bond with your children daddy. We'll be back tomorrow."

"This house is too big for me to be in it alone." He says with his lips pouted. He finally got me the house in Morningside and this month will be our first full month there. Its huge but perfect. I have some renovation ideas but they will have to wait for a while.

"Are you scared?"

"Very, come save me." I laugh.

"From what? Your kids?"

"No, this?" He takes the phone down to show me his erect penis. Lord Jesus have mercy.

"What are you so busy with that got you like that?
Are you watching porn?"

"No, I stumbled upon your nudes on my phone."

"Are you drunk? I don't do nudes."

"Come home and I'll show you."

"No can do Baba, I still have to go to the cake tasting and then the bridesmaids have a fitting." The phone goes back to his face and he is sulking. It's true what they say about husbands, they are a wife's unofficial first born.

"Do you need to be there? I'm sure the girls will love the dresses."

"I still need to make sure it's the design I chose. You know with our mothers who decided to appoint

themselves as wedding planners the girls might just show up in 1980 wedding dresses." He laughs.

"Let them hear you say that and they will remind you that they were very stylish during their time."

"That's true. Let me finish up here so we can finish early. It's not even noon yet and I'm already tired."

"See that's why I said come home."

"Bye bye Khuzwayo, I'll see you soon." I cut the call and look at myself in the mirror. I am definitely saying yes to this dress.

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The trip to the bakery is short since it's at the mall. We walk past Kevin's optometry and I see him in the reception talking to the PA. I walk a few feet behind the girls before I stop and look back at the optometry.

"Dont even think about it." Simz whispers next to me.

"Think about what?"

"You know exactly what I'm talking about."

"Relax, I'm not thinking about anything. I'll be right back, just tell the gogo's I went to the bathroom."

"Tivikele Khuzwayo."

"2 minutes." I say reversing back to the optometry. Simz clenches her teeth as I walk away.

I walk in and Kevin turns to look at me. With a smile on his face he looks at me from head to toe. Once upon a time my clit would be throbbing by now. But a girl has grown.

"Dr Forbes. Good day."

"Mrs Khuzwayo, to what do I owe the pleasure of this visit?" His Receptionist is looking at me with a smile on her face. She's new so she doesn't know me.

"Is a girl not allowed to come see an old friend?" He

smiles and fixes his tie. He has grown his beard, he kinda looks cute.

"Of course she is. Please come through to my office." He leads the way and I follow him to the office. He stands on the side of the door allowing me to walk in first. I know he is only doing that so he can stare at my butt.

"Nothings changed around here." I say looking around the office. He chuckles and stands behind me.

"You've changed. You're glowing and radiant. Marriage life must be treating you very well." I turn around and almost bump into his broad chest. I take a couple of steps back and he chuckles.

"It's okay." He walks around and sits down on top of his desk. I turn around to stand facing him.

"I heard you're getting married in a couple of weeks. I guess my invitation is still on it's way."

"It's not." Who in their right mind would invite a friend with benefits to their wedding. Especially one the groom knows about. I'm not about to create drama at my wedding. He clutches his chest pretending to be shocked.

"And here I was thinking we were friends. I'm hurt." I roll my eyes and take out an invitation and hold it up.

"Friends with benefits don't get invited to weddings Kevin."

"Yeah but friends do."

"Not those who used to have 'with benefits' after the friend." I put the invitation back in my bag and he laughs.

"What are you afraid of? You think your man will find out about us?"

"He knows."

"Open book, nice foundation for a marriage."

"Thank you." Why did I come in here again? Oh yeah I remember. "Listen I was hoping to talk to you about

something. So T.N.M Technologies is looking to give out reading glasses to kids in Alex for its Community Outreach Program this year. I spoke to a school there and they say some of the kids have issues with their eyesight so I thought we could partner up with a reputable optometrist and help the kids."

"I'm all ears."

"So I was hoping we could run some tests on the kids see what they need then we get them what they need. Then we will go back and hand out the glasses or whatever it is they need."

"Okay, I'm game."

"Good. I will draw up a proper proposal and maybe get some of my clients to sponsor the whole thing."

"I'll be waiting."

"Cool. Let me leave you to your work." I turn and walk to the door.

"Going home?"

"No, cake tasting." He chuckles and gets up from the desk.

"I'll walk you out."

We walk out chatting about nothing in particular. We get to reception and chat a bit before I give him a hug and walk out. Two steps out of the shop and I find Makhosi standing by the wall looking at me. My heart starts rapidly beating out of control. No, it's not guilt, it's more the fear of what he must think. I take a few steps close to him and hug him, well more like try to because he stands there with his hands in his pockets and says nothing. What the hell is he doing here even.

"Hi, what are you doing here?"

"Everyone is waiting for you." He turns and walks down to the bakery. Yep, this is bad, really bad. I get to the bakery and everyone looks at me like I was lost or something and now I've been found.

"Really Tivikele, we've been waiting for you for fifteen

minutes now." Mum says as soon as I sit down. I know she's exaggerating, I was there for less than ten minutes. "Where were you?"

"Can we get to the tasting please."

"Really? You disappear while we are here waiting for you and you want to come and tell us what to do?" I'm pretty sure by now the cake already tastes sour. I look over at Makhosi and he is staring at me with judgment in his eyes.

The Baker comes in and gives us as much info on the cake as possible, how many layers and flavors and fillings and all but I hear none of it. All I want to do right now is try and explain myself to this man but from the looks of it, it will be an uphill battle.

We finish the cake tasting and I text the woman who is making the bridesmaids dresses asking her to come to the house instead to do the fittings and she immediately agrees. Perfect, now we can just go home.

"What's next? The fitting?" Busi asks.

"Yeah but we will do it at the house. Nzalamo is coming." Makhosi looks and me and shakes his head then gets up from the chair and walks out.

"When did you talk to her?" Mum asks.

"Just now. Let's go." I get up and follow Makhosi. I walk a bit faster since his pace is rather fast. I catch up to him in the parking.

"Can we talk?" He looks at me and just gets in the car. I open the passenger side and get in. "Its not what it looks like."

"Dont you have people to drive home?" Seriously, is that all he is going to say? Just then Gcinile knocks on the window. I roll down the window.

"Car keys please. You'll find us in the car." I hand her the keys.

"You can drive home, I'll drive home with Makhosi." I hear him chuckle next to me and Gcinile furrows her

brow and walks away.

"I'm not going home." He says.

"No problem, let's go." I put the seat belt on and he looks at me.

"What do you think you're doing?"

"I went to Kevin to talk to him about the COP we have to do. That's all it was."

"I didnt say it was anything. Heck I didnt say anything about you being late to your cake tasting appointment because you got held up at your exes. So I dont know why you're explaining yourself." My phone beeps and when I check its Nzalamo saying she is ten minutes away.

"We have to go home. Nzalamo is also bringing your shirts to fit. So you'll have to tell your friends to come over." He starts the car and we drive home in silence. Awkward silence. I dont know why I'm feeling guilty because I didnt do anything wrong, but

I also understand how he could think something was happening. We get home and Nzalamo is already there. Everyone is there including my three extra cousins.

Once the fitting is done mum decides that we should have a braai. Makhosi and his friends go out to buy the meat and charcoal while we prepare the pap and salads. They come back and the 'party' begins. It's hard for me to enjoy this party with the tension between us. I just want it to be over ASAP. Since the guys are drinking Ndalo says they should move the party somewhere else because there are kids in the house. Mum decides to drive MamKhuzwayo home. Everyone prepares to leave. I take MJ and head up to the bedroom only to find Makhosi putting on a shirt. I guess he is leaving too. I put MJ in his crib and sit on the bed.

"You're leaving?" Silence. "You can't ignore me forever Makhosi. We need to talk about this." He

turns and looks at me.

"About what exactly Tivikele? Tell me what do we have to talk about?"

"This awkwardness between us?" He laughs and shakes his head.

"Awkwardness? You call what you did awkwardness? You call leaving your family and friends and hooking up with your ex awkwardness? You're unbelievable." He turns back to the mirror and buttons up his shirt.

"Firstly he is not my ex, and secondly there was no hooking up. You know me better than that Makhosi." He turns back to look at me.

"You're right, I do know you better than that. So what did you do? have a quickie in his office. He must be weak if he can go that quick."

"Wow."

"Wow what? Was it the best quickie of your life? I remember a time when you'd come to the club for a quickie every once in a while so I wouldn't put it past

you to pop in and out of his office." I feel a lump form on my throat and tears forming in my eyes.

"I'm going to check on Hlelo." I get off the bed and walk to the door.

"Maybe you should take a shower first. I wouldn't want my daughter being polluted by your exes scent." I stop and turn around to look at him.

"You know I can recall a few times when I was terrorized by your exes, and I don't remember a time when I judged you or made you feel guilty for it. I haven't 'hooked up' with anyone since you and I got together. But if you want to believe that then believe it." I walk out and go to Hlelo's nursery. I wipe the tears that are slowly dripping down my face before I see my daughter.

"Do I get to say I told you so now or wait until later?" I turn around and find Simz standing behind me.

"Not now, please." She sighs and gives me a hug.

"He will come around. Let's go to the club with the others and forget about this for just a moment." I pull out of the hug.

"No I'm good. I won't be good company anyway. Have fun."

"I can stay with you and Themba can pick me up from here." She offers.

"No, go have fun. We will talk tomorrow."

"Okay. Take care of yourself and my babies. We will talk tomorrow." She gives me a peck on the cheek and walks out.

How can an innocent meeting bring this much trouble?

THE PLAYERS GUIDE

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Unedited

I should be downstairs having the time of my life right now instead of being stuck in the office right now, but the picture of my wife in that man's arms won't leave my brain. And to make matters worse he is right here, probably laughing at the idiot that's me. I want to believe my wife, I really do, but I still don't understand why their 'meeting's had to happen when we were supposed to have our cake tasting. Now I regret going there. I should have just let the women take care of it. Melody walks in with her skimpy uniform and a glass in her hand.

"Your usual." She says placing the glass of Hennessy on the table. It's neat with just a couple of ice blocks. Just the way I like it. "Penny for your thoughts." She

takes a seat on the opposite chair looking at me.

"Dont you have customers to serve?" She chuckles and stands up. She comes around the desk and stands behind me. I feel her hands on my shoulders as she starts massaging me.

"You're tense. Wedding planning driving you nuts?" I ignore her question and drink the whiskey in front of me. "You know if you want to talk, I'm here. Just say the word and I'll be ready to listen, anytime, day or night." I wish I could tell her all about my frustrations right now but I know better than to tell another woman about problems I'm having with my wife.

The door to the office opens and for a moment my heart skips a beat thinking its Tivi, but Ndalo walks in with Luzuko and Jobe behind him. Ndalo gives Melody a nasty look and she leaves.

"What's with you tonight?" Jobe asks me. He takes a seat while the others stand.

"Trouble in paradise." Luzuko answers throwing himself on the couch.

"What kind of trouble?" Ndalo asks. You'd think being the most observant of the group he would have noticed something. "What happened?" I tell them the gist of what happened. As soon as I'm done these idiots burst out laughing. This is why men never speak about their feelings.

"What is funny?" I ask. They look at each other and laugh.

"Please let me tell him. Please I beg you?" Jobe says. Ndalo pat's him on the shoulder giving him the go ahead. The only thing I'm afraid of with him is that Jobe has no filter and he tends to bring his taxi rank tendencies everywhere he goes.

"You're stupid." He says with a stern face on. Hard to believe he was laughing his lungs out just seconds ago. I cross my arms on my chest and look at him with my brows creased. "You were just getting a massage from your ex or is it current? We dont know.

But you are angry at Tivikele for seeing an opportunity for her business and taking it. Yeah, you're stupid." The other two nod their heads in agreement.

"Did you hear anything I just said? She left her family and went to her ex fuck buddies office and they were alone in the office for almost ten minutes. Which part of that dont you understand?"

"Oh we understand alright." Luzuko says sitting up on the couch. "You're not just stupid you're a hypocrite. Go out there and see how many women you've shagged are there, and I'm sure many of them would jump at the opportunity to get in your bed again. Yet you're here not only judging your wife but throwing her past back in her face. My brother, you can't cry over something if you dont even know her reasoning for it. You didnt sit down and ask her why she felt the need to take that small opening and talk to Kevin instead of making an appointment. Instead you came with guns blazing full of judgemental bullets. And now you're here sulking when you

should be home with your wife who just gave you another child in less than two years." Ndalo and Jobe clap their hands as if this one just gave an oscar worthy speech.

"Wow, you make a lot of sense when you're drunk. You should drink more often." Ndalo tells him. Luzuko stands up and takes a mock bow.

"I have my moments."

"Look man, what we are trying to tell you is don't lose a good thing just because of your own insecurities. If she says nothing happened in that office then the least you can do is trust that. A marriage without trust is doomed. You've worked way too hard to get yourself back in Tivikele's life, do you really want to throw that away? For suspicions?" Ndalo adds.

I sigh and take a sip of my drink. I dont know why everyone is acting like I'm the one who did something wrong. I'm not the one who left my family

to go meet up with an ex, alone, in his office, yet I'm the one being called a hypocrite. Never ask for advice from married men, they will always side with women.

"Okay then bo holier than thou, the party is downstairs. Let's go." I take my drink and walk out of the office leaving them there. I join the party happening and its exactly what I need to forget about the scene I saw earlier today.

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The last time I drank this much I was probably in varsity. My head hurts like hell, my eyes are heavy and the heartburn, God the heartburn. I should not have drank this much. But regret is a useless feeling right now. I try to turn on..... wait where am I even? I slowly open my eyes and look around. Okay from the looks of it I am on a bed. Sleeping face down. Good. I think. I turn my heavy head and face a

window with the curtains drawn. From the looks of it, it's already morning. I lift my wrist and bring it up to my face and look at the time, its after twelve in the afternoon. Shit.

I drag myself out of the bed and scan my surroundings. I hope I didnt do anything stupid last night. I see a small door and walk to it with my head in my hands. I swear if I let go of it, it will probably fall off. I open the door and find a bathroom. Thank God. I open the water in the sink and splash it all over my face. It doesn't help the hangover but it helps the tiredness and refreshes my face a bit. I take the towel hanging on the rail and wipe my face.

I stink, I have alcohol and cigarettes smell all over me but I cannot shower now, I need to get home. I go back to the bedroom and find my shoes sitting by the side of the bed. I put them on and grab my phone on the pedestal. I try to turn it on to check messages but it's off.

I walk out and the huge picture of Ndalo and his wife
I come face to face with let's me know where I am.
Perfect. I walk down the stairs and find him and his
kids in the lounge debating about cartoons. Adulting,
I tell you.

"Good morning." They turn to look at me and the kids
come running to me screaming their lungs out,
worsening the headache I have. I put on a smile and
pick them up and swing them around. Their giggles
fill the room.

"Okay guys, go fire up the playstation, I'll be there
just now." Ndalo says and the kids run off shouting. I
sit down next to him on the couch.

"I thought you were dead for a moment."

"And you didnt come to check on me?"

"I know you mosi, death fears you so I wasnt worried.
And, it's good afternoon, not good morning." I try to

laugh but this headache is driving me nuts.

"What happened last night?"

"The party was lit, you got kak drunk, I brought you back here and you slept. I didnt think Tivikele or Hlelo should see you like that."

"I didnt drive here did I?"

"No. But I drove your car." He takes the keys from the side table and hands them to me.

"Thanks man. I need to go home and try and fix my problems."

"Look, I know last night we might have been harsh but you know we are always going to tell you the truth. Tivikele loves you, she's no saint but neither are you. Fix this bro, before you lose the best thing that's happened to you." I sigh and get up.

"I know man. Let me get going. Where's Ntokozo?"

"She went to buy lunch." He says and walks me out. I turn to him just before I get in the car.

"Can you do me a favour?" He nods his head. "Can you find another spot for that huge ass picture right outside the guest room. That shit scary." He throws his head back laughing.

"Thats a little reminder to every guest who uses that room that kukwam la. (This is my house.) And they must tow the line." I shake my head and get in my car. I put the phone on the charger and drive out after waving at him.

By the time I get home my phone is at fifteen percent. I turn it on while parked on the driveway. I find a whole lot of missed calls from Tivikele. Shit. I get off the car and walk to the house. Its quiet. Too quiet. I almost go into panic mode thinking she's taken the kids and left me, but then I remember that I saw her car parked outside. I figure let me take a shower before I go explain myself to her.

I run up the stairs taking them two at a time. I start in Hlelo's nursery and she is taking her afternoon

nap. Sleeping like an angel. I kiss her on the forehead and walk out again careful not to make a noise. I go to our bedroom. I take a deep breath before I open the door. I get in and find Tivikele on the bed with MJ on her breast. If looks could kill, I'd be ten feet under right now.

"Hi." She takes her eyes off me and focuses on the baby. I head straight to the bathroom since I'm being ignored. Before I start my grovelling I need to first make sure I am clean. I get under the shower scrub off the scent of alcohol. When I'm done I grab a towel and wrap it around my waist and walk out to the bedroom. My wife is no longer on the bed. She is standing by the crib shushing MJ. I decide not to disturb her. I get my lotion and start smothering the cream on my body. When she is sure MJ is sleeping she walks out of the bedroom with the baby monitor.

I put on a vest and some shorts and follow her out. I find her in the kitchen making a smoothie.

"Can we talk." She fires daggers at me with her eyes before turning the blender on. After about a minute of the blender making my head worse than it was she switches it off. "Now can we talk?" She adds a bit of milk to the mixture and fires up the blender again. This is not punishment, its hell on earth.

"Tivikele, can we please talk." I say after she turns the blender off.

"What do you want to talk about? Or do you want a quickie? Apparently I give them out nilly willy these days." She pours the smoothie into a glass and looks at me. "What do you want to talk about?"

"About us."

"You, me and who?"

"Look, I know you're angry right now....." she chuckles.

"I'm not angry Makhosi I am disappointed. You, off all people have the guts to throw my past back in my

face like you're a saint. You know what, you're right. I am angry. I am furious in fact. I spent the whole night thinking about this since my lovely husband was nowhere to be found. I didn't do anything wrong yesterday. If you had taken the time to listen to me then you would have known why I went to Kevin. Khwezi has been trying to get hold of him without any luck, I saw him and I saw an opportunity to talk to him. Granted, the timing was off, that much I can admit. But to accuse me of being some cheap slut giving out quickies, that was low, even for you." She says. I thought she was just angry but seeing her now I realize I hurt her more than I angered her. Her eyes are red and her nose is flared.

"Look, I didn't mean it like that."

"Then how did you mean it Makhosi? You threw a tantrum because I had one lousy chance meeting with my ex. In case you forgot Bhuti, you run a lodge with your ex, and just a few weeks back you flew to Limpopo for a 'status meeting' with said ex. You didn't see me throw a tantrum. You go to the club

every chance you get even with your ex girlfriend, shag buddy, sperm dish or whatever she was, there every night working. Yes, I know about Melody. You dont see me throwing my toys about it. Your slay queens show up to the same club every night hoping to score with you, not once did I ever sulk about it. Why? Because I'd like to believe that the man i married is smart enough to know what's important to him and he won't do anything to jeopardize that. But you cant afford me that same courtesy."

"Tivikele?"

"No, I'm not done, you said you wanted us to talk right, well I'm talking now. Is this how our lives are going to be like, you'll keep throwing my past in my face everytime I do something you dont agree with? Cause if that's the case then I also have plenty of your dirt to throw around. You seem to forget that you and I were the same. The only difference between you and me is that I have a vagina so my past will always be condemned whereas yours will be praised. I love you, and I've been committed to

this relationship from day one but you dont see that. Two kids later and you still dont see it. Do you trust me Makhosi?"

"Of course I trust you."

"Then maybe start showing it." She takes her smoothie and goes to the lounge. I follow behind her like a lost puppy.

"Look I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said what I said to you. You're right, it was low and mean. I'm sorry. But truth be told you cant blame me for thinking some type of way. You delayed your own cake tasting to see an ex. What was I supposed to think?" I take a seat next to her on the couch.

"I dont know Makhosi, how about listening. I know that was probably the wrong time to do what I did but you know how important this COP is. We've spoken about it."

"I know, and there are about a zillion optometrists around, you could have gone to one of them. I dont understand why he needs to be in the picture

somehow." She puts the glass on the coffee table and turns around to look at me.

"Khwezi has been sending out proposals for the past two months to different optometrists. She's been getting no responses or not interested emails. Kevin was our last hope and even he was hard to track down."

"Until you spoke to him and all of a sudden he was game. Do you see how suspicious this is?" She chuckles.

"Fine Makhosi, let's do this. I'll tell Khwezi not to work with Kevin. Will that work for you?" I'm not sure if she is mocking me or just plain being sarcastic.

"That will work just fine, thank you." I've also discovered I am pretty too.

"Good, then you'll sell your shares in the lodge, you'll fire Melody and ban all your slay queens from coming to the club. Does that work too?" I knew she

was up to something.

"I cant let go of the lodge. It's been doing great lately and I cant ban people from coming to the club without a valid reason."

"Oh you have a reason. Tell them your wife doesnt like you hanging around your former hook ups. That's what I'll tell Kevin, that my husband has a problem with me working with him." I still wonder how Eve was conned by a snake when women have the innate ability to twist everything around.

"Look, I'll stop going to the club if that's what will make you happy." She sighs and puts her hair in a ponytail.

"Makhosi, it's not about you going or not going. Its about trust. I trust you, I choose to believe that you're not going to mess up our family for whatever reason there may be. I dont understand why you're being insecure all of a sudden. I'm the one with stretch mark's and a stomach that refuses to go back to its original size and even stitches from

pushing your big headed babies out, I'm the one who should feel some type of way but I try my best to not let that affect our relationship. And Kevin knows I chose you and he knows not to cross that line."

"So you're telling me that given an opportunity to be with you he wouldn't take it?" Okay now I'm seriously starting to sound like an insecure girlfriend. What the fuck is wrong with me?

"Oh he would definitely take it. Two kids later and I still look like a snack, oh he definitely would." And here I was thinking we are ironing things out. "The point is, I chose you, at the end of the day I am yours. And yours alone. He knows that and he knows if he ever crossed that line it would be because I invited him to, and I'm not about to do that. If I had wanted to do that it would have happened when we broke up. Makhosi, if I can believe in myself enough inspite of my imperfections right now then I'm sure you can too. And this conversation should be the other way around. I'm the one who should be worried about your exes cause clearly something down there

makes them want to come back for more."

I sigh and wrap my arms around her shoulders bringing her close to me. I kiss the top of her head.

"I'm sorry. I just... I lost you once Tivikele and that was hell, I don't want to lose you again."

"Carry on like this and you definitely will. Until I met you I never saw myself settling down and building a family. But you and your stubbornness made me see things differently." She runs her hand down my stomach until she grabs my dick. She lets go of it and grabs my balls and I groan. She pulls away from my arms and stares at me. "Just so we are clear, if you ever leave me to sleep alone cause you're kak drunk somewhere, I'll cut your balls off." I chuckle and look at her hand as it slowly massages my balls. I'll never understand why women are regarded as the weaker sex. She has my balls in her hands and in one squeeze she could end an entire Khuzwayo generation.

"I know what you can do with my balls right now."

She lets go of them and stands up taking her smoothie with her.

"I also know what I wanted to do to them last night. But you weren't here so..." she shrugs her shoulders and walks away.

"We can do it now." I shout after her. She turns back like she is thinking about something.

"Nope. What I wanted to do cannot be done with the sun out like this. It needs the cover of darkness." She winks and walks away.

"Tonight then?"

"It was a one time surprise. It's gone now." She shouts over her shoulder.

Curiosity drives me nuts. Why the fuck did I not come back home last night. Damn Hennessy.

PS: I will see you guys on Monday. I don't have data so I will post again on Monday when I get to work.

Happy Weekend

THE PLAYERS GUIDE

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unedited

sponsored by Anonymous

Wedding plans are coming along quite beautifully. Well I can say that because I am not the one doing the planning. Since my mum and her bestie, Mam'Khuzwayo are planning the whole thing, all they need me for is to make decisions on colors and what I prefer. Lucky for me I am not an indecisive person, I know what I want and what I like and no one can tell me different. And that gives me time to bond with my son and just be a mum. It's almost perfect.

"Your son is ugly." And that would be my dearest brother Mabutho who has my son in his lap.

"Hey, he looks like me, dont say he is ugly." Makhosi

answers defending his son.

"Its exactly why I'm saying he is ugly because he looks like you." Makhosi takes a cushion and throws it at Mabutho who is laughing and using my son to shield himself. I swear I'll kill him.

"What kind of uncle are you? Why are you hiding behind my boy?"

"Blame his father. He is the one throwing things around."

"Mxm, you're a horrible uncle." Makhosi gets up and takes MJ from him. "Its a good thing your Khuzwayo gene's are strong as fuck. We wouldnt want you to be like your idiot uncle." He tells his son as he walks up the stairs.

"I still have my sjambok, just so you know." Mabutho shouts after him and I laugh.

As soon as Makhosi is out of sight I look at my brother, even though he is smiling and laughing, I know when something is bothering him. He's been

saying he is fine but he has lost weight and the bags under his eyes are probably Prada. I get up and pour him a drink. I hand it to him then take a sit next to him.

"So, will you tell me what's going on?" He looks at me with a frown on his face.

"What do you mean?"

"Mabutho, I know you're not Okay. I can see it. You've lost weight and you dont look like someone who has been sleeping very well. Tell me what's going on." He sighs and gulps down the drink.

"I dont know. Ever since that whole Joshua thing I've become, reserved, I guess. Ever since I went private, the best part about my job was meeting new people, seeing different places and building relationships with my clients. I dont know how many houses I've slept in over the years. People with summer houses in mountains and beaches somewhere were happy to have me there. No matter if someone was having an affair and they needed to fly to the Maldives for a

secret baecation they knew even in a court of law I would never open my mouth and tell on them. Now I am afraid to get to close to them because I'm afraid they will do to me the same thing Joshua did." I pull him in for a hug. "Its stupid I know."

"There is nothing stupid about it Mabutho." He pulls out of the hug and gets up to pour himself another drink.

"I am judging innocent people based on the actions of one man. Yeah I think that's pretty stupid."

"Have you gone for counseling?" He frowns and sits down again.

"I was arrested once, no questioned once, there are people who've had it harder than me and they are fine. I just need to toughen up and be a man about it." Remind me to teach my son that he doesnt need to toughen up for shit.

"You're not a criminal Mabutho, you were given a

speeding ticket once and you've never gone over the limit since. It's only normal that you would be affected by this." He sips his drink and sits back on the couch. "Tell you what, how about I make an appointment for you with my therapist. Just one appointment and if it's not something you like then you will 'toughen up' on your own."

"I guess it's worth a try. Its not like I have anything to lose. I've already fucked up my life enough."

"What do you mean?"

"Pinky is not talking to me."

"Yeah I am not getting involved in that. I was against this relationship to begin with but you're grown adults, you'll figure it out. So what happened to Kemi?"

"Anything that has Joshua in it is off limits to me. I dont want it."

"Let me get this straight, you were with Pinky, then did what you did with Kemi and when that failed you think you'll waltz back into Pinky's life just like that?"

"Of course not, I was just....."

"No, dont tell me. I do not want to know. You're both adults. Figure it out." I take my phone and find Dr Steenkamp's number and give it to him. "I'll call her and let her know you're coming. Go take a nap I'll cook."

"Sure."

He stands up and takes a few steps before turning back.

"So Khanya got me a settlement from the department."

"So soon?"

"I was just as surprised. I know people who still have their lawsuits pending. How legit is this man?"

"As legit as legit can be. I didnt even know you were going to court."

"That's the thing, I didnt. Khanya called me a couple of days ago and said he has a settlement.

Apparently it was an out of court settlement. I'm not

sure what the man does but from the looks of it, the department is afraid of him." I get off the couch and go to the kitchen with Mabutho behind me.

"They should be. Last I heard he cleaned them out with an over R200 million settlement. So maybe they didn't want to be in the spotlight again."

"Well whatever it is, I am just happy that my bank account has a few more zeros in it."

"So what are you getting me?" He takes a bottle of water from the fridge and reverses out of the room.

"I'm going to take that nap now. Later." I hear him run up the stairs. I need to draw up a list of what he is going to buy me.

I get started on my lunch. Makhosi comes down the stairs with a file in his hand. I hope he is not going to the club. He sits down on the counter watching me move around the kitchen with his phone in his hand.

"You know instead of watching me you could help

me." He chuckles and puts the phone down.

"Come here." I hesitate. "Please." I go around the counter and stand next to him.

"What's up?" He opens the file and pushes it towards me. "What's this?"

"I've decided to sign the lodge over to the kids. You were right, I dont need to be working with my ex, especially someone who is in a different province. So I've decided to transfer the shares to a trust in the kids name. Of course We will oversee the running of it from time to time."

"Makhosi, I did not say stop working with your ex, I said I trust you."

"I know. And I trust you. But there wont be any other 'status' meetings without you by my side. And Melody is leaving the club."

"When I said fire her I didn't mean it." He chuckles and wraps his arms around my waist and pulls me close to him.

"I know. But she wasn't fired. Ndalo found her another job. She is excited about it."

"That's good. So you won't be getting massages from her?" He stops smiling and frowns.

"What?"

"I said she won't be giving you massages anymore."

"It was one time. And how did you know about it?" I see fear fill his eyes.

"I'm a woman. I know things." I'm not about to tell him about Ndalo's slip of the tongue.

"It was one time and it didn't mean anything. I swear." Tiny droplets of sweat form on his forehead. I'm not sure if I should laugh or what.

"Khuzwayo, relax. Breathe. I'm not about to leave you. Just know that as a woman, I have a God given sixth sense, and when you do start getting meaningful messages from people I will know."

He pulls my face and kisses me. The kiss is hungry and lustful. I feel him grab my ass and pull me closer

to him till I can feel his growing manhood. I pull out of the kiss.

"Control yourself Khuzwayo. We are in the kitchen."

"Its our house, we can do whatever we want." He pulls me back again.

"My brother is upstairs. Have you forgotten?"

Speaking of brothers I need to check on Mzwandile, he is supposed to come and drive us down to KZN for the umembeso. I need to know when he is coming so I can be prepared.

"When is he going home again?" He asks bringing me back to the present. I lightly punch him on the chest and pull out of his embrace.

"He will go. When is Sphetho bringing my milk?"

"I'll call him and ask. You need to sign these documents. I'll put them in the safe so long." He takes the file and leaves.

Lunch is served. Mabutho seems a bit better after his little nap. He is laughing and joking around. Even though physically he looks rather drained but hopefully Dr Steenkamp can handle the emotional part. I'll never forgive Joshua for what he did to my brother. Even in death he still makes his life a living hell. But not for long.

After lunch Makhosi decides to take the kids so I can have some rest. He and Mabutho take the kids to their grandparents giving me a chance to get in the tub and relax. I fill the tub with water and bubbles. I soak myself in. I go through some emails and social media just to keep myself busy. How is it that when I had no kids and no man I was never bored, now I have kids and a man and when they are not here it's like my life comes to a standstill. I guess this is what most women mean when they say their lives revolve around their families.

I get off the tub and order some food from the clubs

restaurant. The joy's of being the bosses wife. I put on some lounge wear and then head downstairs. I choose a movie on Netflix and sit back on the couch with a glass of red grape juice next to me. I can pretend its red wine. I try to call Mzwandile but he doesnt answer my calls. For his sake he better have a good enough reason why he is ignoring his big sister.

The gate buzzer goes off and I stand up to check who it is.

"Hi, Mrs Khuzwayo, your delivery is here." I thought the manager would bring my order, and I know he is a man. And his voice definitely doesnt sound like that. I buzz the person in then stand by the window looking at the driveway. A car pulls up to the entrance. The person who exits the car is definitely not someone I was expecting but the paper bag looks familiar. She knocks on the door.

I take a deep breath and open the door.

"Mrs Khuzwayo. Your delivery." She lifts up the paperbag. I open the burglar gate and she walks in.

"Melody. I thought Alvin would make the delivery." She turns and looks at me with a smile on her face.

"Oh the club is busy so I offered to bring the food. I hope you dont mind." I put on a fake ass smile. It's easier to deal with her when she is not in my face but right now I dont know why she is here or what she wants really.

"Of course not. Thank you." I take the paperbag from her.

"Nice house." She says looking around.

"Thanks."

"So where is hubby and the little ones?" She says the word like its poisonous.

"Visiting my brother." I'm not about to tell her shit that has nothing to do with her.

"Right. Okay then. It was nice seeing you again." I could say the same thing but I dont want to lie.

"Thank you." We stand there in awkward silence like she is expecting me to invite her for dinner.

"Well I should get going." Finally.

"Thank you for the food." I open the door wider and watch her walk out slowly. I lock the burglar door behind her then lock the door.

I stand by the door until I hear the car drive off. I dish up and settle back in front of the TV. An hour later Makhosi and Mabutho come back. Without my kids. They find me watching Lucifer on Netflix. Mabutho sits down across from me and Makhosi sits next to me. Mabutho looks like he has been crying. His eyes are bloodshot red. Makhosi cant even look at me in the eye. My kids. My heart begins to pound rapidly. What happened to my kids?

"Makhosi, where are my children?" He holds my hand and I feel tears knocking on my eyes. "Makhosi?"

"They are at the farm." That's a relief.

"Then why do you look like someone died. What happened?" In my head I'm trying to lighten the mood but from the looks of it I'm failing. They exchange looks. I wonder what's going on.

"We have to tell you something." Makhosi starts.

"Okay."

"We got a call from your mum earlier, she said there was an accident."

"Is she okay? What happened?" The panic comes back again. "Let me call her." He takes the phone from my hand. "Makhosi?"

"Your mum is fine. Physically."

"Okay but I'd like to hear that from her. Give me my phone."

"Mum was not in the accident Tivikele, she is fine." These two are going to drive me nuts.

"Okay then what's going on. Can one of you tell me before I lose my mind."

"Mzwandile was in the accident."

"Is he okay? Is that why his phone wouldn't go through earlier?" That would explain everything.

"Babe, Mzwandile passed away an hour ago. He was pronounced dead at the scene."

I feel everything slow down around me. It feels like time also just slowed down. My brain is still trying to process the passed away part. I don't understand. I stand up and look at the two of them.

"If this is a joke, it's not funny. Death is not something to play with." I look from one to the other and the Eastern looks on their faces have not changed. I see a tear roll down Mabutho's face and right then, everything they just told me registers in my head, but my heart is still in denial. I grab my phone from the table and dial mums number. She picks up after a while.

"Tivikele." She's not jolly, she's not telling me about the wedding, she's not asking about the kids. A tear rolls down my face.

"Mum, where is Mzwandile?" I hear her sniffing on the other end.

"Where is your husband?" That's not the answer I want.

"Mum you cant answer a question with another question. Where is my brother? He said he'd come and drive us home, I need him to tell me what time I should be ready. Please." I whisper the last word as my mum tells me he really is dead. My brother is gone.

A loud, painful scream rolls out from the pits of my soul. I want my brother. I feel hands circle around me and hold me up from falling to the floor.

THE PLAYERS GUIDE

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Unedited

Sponsored by Anonymous

I've never felt more useless in my life than I do now. It's hard seeing someone you love deteriorating right in front of your eyes and in such a short space of time. I don't know what else to do to get Tivikele out of the funk she's in long enough to get her to eat a proper meal. I've made her some soft porridge, I can only hope she will eat.

"Let me take that up to her. Wena watch the kids."
Mum says walking into the kitchen.

"I dont even know if she will eat."

"Well let me try. When are you going down to Durban anyway, maybe she needs to be with her family."

"We will leave tomorrow. Her mum insisted she stays a bit because she can't leave the kids for too many days so if we leave tomorrow then we will be in Durban for atleast five days."

"You're not taking the kids?"

"No, I was hoping we can leave them with Phila and Sphetho, if it's okay. Her father said they are too young to be at a funeral."

"He is right. I never understand people who take kids to funerals. They can stay. Then Makoti has to pump enough milk to last a couple of days and with formula they should be fine."

"Yeah. Let me go check on the kids."

"Alright. I'll take the food upstairs." I watch her walk up the stairs with the tray of food.

I go to the lounge and my kids are oblivious to the chaos happening around them. Which is good. I watch them play for a while. My phone rings and Alvin's name flashes on the screen.

"Alvin."

"Hey. I heard you're going to Durban soon and I need you to sign for the invoices and we can pay the suppliers before the weekend. I can come to you if it's okay."

"No, it's okay. I'll come to you. I need some air."

"Okay then. I'll see you soon." I hang up the call just as mum and Tivikele walk down the stairs. This is a surprise cause she's been cooped up in the bedroom for the past two days now. Mum walks to the kitchen and Tivikele comes to the lounge. I stand up and give her a hug.

"Hey, you came down." She looks up at me with a cute pout.

"uMa bullied me to leave my warm bed and come down here." Thank God for mum.

"That's good. How are you feeling?"

"Like I'm in a nightmare and I dont know when I will

wake up." I help her sit down and Hlelo immediately comes and climbs on top of her.

"I'm sorry. I wish there was something I can do to make it better."

"And no one wants to tell me what happened. Mum says we will talk about it when I get home. I don't understand what is so hard about telling me what happened."

"They are just trying to protect you."

"From what? Mzwandile is dead. It's not like if they tell me what happened he will be more dead." I can see the frustration in her eyes. I also dont know why they wont tell her what happened.

"Look, we will fly down tomorrow and they will tell us what happened." She sighs and hugs Hlelo a bit too tight. Hlelo wiggles her way out of the hug and goes back to playing with her toys.

"Do you think he was in pain? Before he died? Did he

suffer? What if he was there for a while in pain before he took his last breath?" I bring her in for a hug and wipe the tears falling from her eyes.

"Okay, okay, listen. You need to stop thinking about this okay. We will get all the answers tomorrow."

"Why did he have to die though. Couldnt he have his legs cut off or something. Why die?"

"Baby please, stop thinking about this, you'll drive yourself nuts." She sighs and wipes her tears as Hlelo comes back with her storybook. She jumps on her mums lap. I know they will be busy for a while, and that gives me the opportunity to go to the club.

I give Tivikele a kiss on the forehead and get up. I head to the kitchen where mum is busy cooking.

"Did she eat?"

"Yep. See my power of persuasion is way better than yours."

"Yeah right. Ma listen, I have to go to the club for some work things. I could bring some food if you

want then you can relax."

"No, makoti needs a proper home cooked meal. Wena you haven't been feeding her properly. She doesn't need junk food right now." Okay then. I was just trying to help.

"Okay then. Let me go. I'll be back soon." I get my car keys and drive to the club. I find Alvin in the office with all the documents ready.

"Hey man." He gets off the chair and shakes my hand.

"Hey. How's the Mrs? Losing a loved one is hard."

"Yeah. She's....." I dont know how she is to be honest. One moment she is tickling and laughing with the kids, the next moment she is lost in her own thoughts. It's hard to tell how she is right now. "She's taking it one day at a time."

"That's good. Let me go check on things. The documents are there, you can read and then sign."

"Sure."

"Can I get you something to drink?"

"No I'm good thanks." He leaves. I go through the documents and once I'm satisfied I sign.

The door opens and Melody walks in. A glass of Hennesy in her hand. She puts the glass down in front of me.

"Alvin said no drink but I figured you could use one."

"What do you want Melody?" She comes around the desk and tries to put her hands on my shoulders but I shrug them away.

"I'm just trying to help you."

"Did I ask for your help?"

"No, but that's what friends are for right? You don't need to ask for my help. I'll always be here." I stand up and turn to face her.

"You're not my friend Melody. We used to fuck, and that's over. Get it through your thick skull. I'm married." She smiles and takes a couple of steps towards me. She tries to put her hands on my chest

but I hold her hand and push them away.

"Come on Makhosi, I've never had an issue with sharing. My mama told me sharing is caring."

"That's nice for you. Please leave me alone. This is not your cue to try harder. I dont want you. Get that inside your head." I get my keys and walk to the door. I turn back before opening the door. "When are you starting your new job?"

"In two weeks. Why? You want us to have a farewell party, just the two of us?" This girl never gives up.

"I have an even better idea, go home. Take the next two weeks and prepare for your new job. Dont worry you'll be paid for those days."

"What? You cant be serious. You want me to lose my tips? Aowa Makhosi." She says walking to me. "Look, okay I'll stay out of your way. I promise." She tries to hold my hand.

"Melody just go home. Today will be your last night

here. I'll make sure Alvin pays you for the rest of the days."

"Makhosi please, dont do this." She says standing between me and the door. "Please, I'll do anything." She says unbuttoning her shirt.

"Tjeses, Melody, you don't listen neh?"

"Makhosi?"

"Hhay voetsek, voetsek Melody. Suka (move)." I push her to the side and open the door and walk out.

I meet Alvin at the bar and tell him to let Melody go. Of course she'll be paid for the days she wont be working. But I dont want to see her here again unless she is a customer. I guess that's one chapter I can close now.

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TIVIKELE

This feels like a never ending nightmare. And right now, sitting in this car driving home to bury my brother, I dont know how to feel.

The car pulls up to the house and as expected its busy. People are walking up and down, you'd think the funeral was happening tomorrow.

"You ready?" Makhosi asks next to me.

"I guess." We get out of the car and head to the house. Dad walks out and meets us by the door. The sight of him brings tears to my eyes. I throw myself at him and just cry. He holds me and we stand there.

"Come on. Let's go inside." My dad keeps his hold on me and we walk inside the house. Mum is in the lounge with two of my aunts sitting on a mattress. I let go of my dad and sit down between my mum and my aunt.

"Hi baby. How are you?" I shrug and lay my head on

her lap.

"What happened mama?" She sighs and runs her hand up and down my arm.

"I dont know nana, the police say he went up to hike on Signal Hill in Cape Town. When he was driving down he lost control of the car and it rolled down the side of the hill and burst into flames." I sit up and look at my mum.

"He was burnt?" She nods her head and wipes her tears.

"Your brothers are still trying to peace everything together. They will explain when they come back." My poor brother, I can't imagine what it must have been like, what if he could see the flames, and he could feel the hear burn his flesh.

"I'll be right back." I get up and walk out the house. I walk to the gate and stand there trying to calm my breathing. I can't get the picture of my baby brother burning out of my head.

I see Makhosi standing with my dad under the tree. I go to them.

"Can I have the car keys." Makhosi turns to look at me, worry all over his face.

"You going somewhere?"

"Yes, I need the car keys. Please."

"Okay, let's go. I'll drive you."

"Makhosi, can I just have the car keys, I don't need a babysitter. Please." Dad touches his arm and I guess he gets the message. He takes the keys out of his pocket and hands them to me. Good thing we parked outside the gate.

I get into the car and drive off. I'm not sure where I'm going, I just keep driving. I find myself in Hillcrest. I drive around a bit till I see a chapel. I drive into the parking lot and get out. I'm not even sure why I'm here right now. But they always say if we have burdens we should bring them to the Lord right?

Maybe he can explain to me why my brother had to die the way he did. Couldn't he let him die first before he cremated him.

I walk into the chapel, its dim with just a few candles lighting up the aisle and the side of the church. Even though there is some light coming from the windows but it's still not as bright as it should be. I walk to the front of the church and sit on the front pew. There is a bunch of candles lit up in the front. I open my mouth trying to say something, a prayer maybe, but words fail me. Instead tears run down like a waterfall.

I feel someone sit behind me. I wipe my tears and turn around. Judging by the collar on neck he must be the pastor. He smiles at me, I try to smile back but fail. I turn back to the candles in front of me.

"Do you think God listens?" I ask the man behind me. I'm not looking at him but he is an advocate for God right, he should have the answers, right?

"He is listening right now. You can talk to him."

"I doubt he listens. I'm sure to him we are just a bunch of cartoons here for his personal entertainment."

"Do you really believe that?"

"Shouldn't I? The past couple of years he has been consistent in breaking me down. Just when I think life is the way it's supposed to be he is ready to remind me who pulls the strings. I'm supposed to get married this weekend, instead I will be burying my brother. My mother went from planning a wedding to planning a funeral. Where is the fairness in that? He is supposed to be compassionate but this, this is far from it."

"I'm sorry for your loss. Maybe you can light a candle for your brother."

"Its not going to bring him back."

"I know. But....."

"But nothing. Thank you for your time. I should go back home."

I get up and leave. I don't know why I bother going in there. I drive back home and find most of the people who were here earlier gone. The only ones left are family. I get in the lounge and find Bahole and Mabutho already there. I give them hugs and sit down.

"Where have you been, we were worried about you."

Mum asks.

"I went for a drive, what's going on?"

"We were just trying to figure out what to do about your wedding."

"Postpone it. What else can we do?" I don't understand why this is even a discussion. My brother is dead, no one has time for a wedding.

"You don't postpone a wedding Tivikele, its taboo."

Aunt Sbongile speaks up.

"You cannot be serious right now. My brother is dead. Who has the time or the energy to be celebrating a

wedding." I snap.

"Tivikele, calm down." Bahole says. "We can have the funeral early in the morning and then the wedding later on." Either these people are high on something or I'm the one who has no clue.

"I dont know whose wedding you think will happen after a funeral cause it sure as hell isnt mine." I get up and go to the bedroom. How am I supposed to have my wedding anniversary on the same day my brother is buried? Taboo or not, the wedding will just have to wait. And if they continue with it, then they will just have to find a bride cause it wont be me.

THE PLAYERS GUIDE

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Unedited

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This is not how this weekend was supposed to go. Right now I should be in my room with my aunts telling me about the dos and don'ts of marriage. I should be rolling my eyes at all the crazy things I'm supposed to not do. But I would also be beaming with pride as my mother tells me never bekezela for anything. She's said it plenty of times before when I wasn't even married and I know she would have repeated it again. Instead of all that, I am in a car driving to Nkandla to bury my brothers remains.

I say remains because I'm pretty sure all that's in that coffin is his skeleton. Only my brothers and my dad saw him. Mum, Gcinile and I were not allowed to

see him. No matter how hard we thought to see him dad wouldnt budge. The casket was closed and sealed from the mortuary. In some way I understand why he would do that, but it still would have given us closure to see him. I guess the only picture I will ever have of his death will be the one I make up in my head.

The drive to Nkandla is long and tedious. It's not as fun as it usually is when we come to visit. There are no phones taking pictures of the lush greenery and mountains. There's been silence since we left home. Gcinile and I are in the backseat of the car. Makhosi is driving with Ndalo in the front seat. It's quite impressive how his friends have all showed up to support us. To think there was a time I didnt like them.

We drive into Nkandla with the hearse in front of us, my uncle's car is leading the convoy. He has been taking care of things since dad, my brothers and the

other men came back from fetching Mzwandile's remains in Cape Town. My dad hasn't been the same since he saw Mzwandile. I guess that's why he refused for us to see him.

The convoy slows down as we enter the gravel road leading us home. A tear drops down to my shirt. I wipe it off but more keep coming. I close my eyes and let them flow. I feel a hand on mine. I open my eyes and see Gcinile's hand holding on to mine. I put my hand over hers and hold on to it tight. I've always thought being a middle child was the best thing ever. I had two older brothers and two younger siblings. I was always floating around doing my own thing, but I have never felt neglected like most middle kids claim to be. I guess that's also thanks to me being the first daughter.

When we were little I used to tease Mzwandile and tell him he was an oops baby. I would tell him he messed up our family algorithm. It was supposed to

be two boys and two girls, but being the party pooper that he is he had to show up. And he is still doing it even now. I know he had no control over his death, but right now, right now it feels like I should wake him up and beat the crap out of him for leaving us like this. Not when he had so much life ahead of him. He had so many dreams and plans, and now all that has gone up in flames. Literally and figuratively.

We pull up to the main home and the tent is already up, mourners are already here. The night virgil will be underway soon. The final send off my brother will get. We get out of the car and walk into the yard on foot. The hearse is parked by the main house. He will be taken into the main house then taken to dad's house which is in the same yard.

Someone belts out Sfiso Ncwane's kulungile baba just as the hearse opens revealing the mahogany casket. Bahole and Mabutho lead the pallbearers as my uncle welcomes my brother home, for the last

time. My dad digs up the last bit of strength he probably has and takes over from my uncle. He leads the procession into the main house, my grandfather's house. The casket is placed in the lounge and a short prayer is conducted before he is taken into his father's house.

Once everything is done and mum is sitting on the mattress with her sons casket in front of her everyone goes out to the tent. Singing and speeches commence. I guess this is why dad didnt want a memorial service.

"Bazalwane (brethren), at this moment I would like to call upon Mzwandile's boss and mentor, Miss Kwanda Mkhize." A hymn starts somewhere in the tent as a beautiful woman stands up and walks to the front. She dabs away a couple of tears before the song ends and she looks up with bloodshot red eyes.

"Uhm, ngyanbingelela nonkhe bazalwane. (I greet you all brethren.) I have known Mzwandile for just over a year. When he joined our company he has so many ideas, so many big dreams. And in the year that I've known him I can safely say he didn't just dream, he followed those dreams, and he never stopped until he made sure they were achieved. When he joined the company he was supposed to be there on a contract basis. But he was so hardworking and impressive with six months he was made permanent and he was in line to join the executive team. Mzwandile is a lover of life, or was lover of life. It's going to take some getting used to referring to him in past tense. I was one of the lucky people who got to experience Mzwandile in all his glory, and I will always be grateful for that privilege. To the Majola family, duduzekani (be comforted), know that you are not alone in your grief. And know that Mzwandile is watching over you, especially his niece and nephew. Thank you." A song starts again as she takes her seat.

"That's probably his girlfriend." Gcinile whispers next to me.

"What?"

"Did you see how sad she was. Have you ever seen a boss cry over an employee like that?" Trust Gcinile and her conspiracy theories.

"I would cry if a hardworking employee passed away." She chuckles.

"Please, he was tapping that ass." She says matter of factly. Now I'm wondering if theres something she knows.

"She looks older than him."

"Not that old. Plus this is Mzwandile we are talking about. When has age ever stopped him."

"Point taken. She's beautiful though."

"Right."

The service continues as speaker after speaker sing his praises. Even some of the people he went to

school with in China flew here for the funeral. They must really have loved him.

I decide to go help out in the kitchen with chopping and cooking, or whatever is happening in there. Being here is starting to get depressing. I meet Makhosi on my way to the kitchen. I know I've seen him in overalls before but seeing him now, helping out somehow makes me fall deeper in love with him.

"Hey, how are you feeling?" He asks.

"I dont know. I think its finally sinking in. Did you eat yet?"

"Not yet. We are going to the gravesite to dig, I'll eat when I come back."

"I can make you something to go with. A sandwich maybe." He smiles and brings me in for a hug.

"Baby, dont worry about it, I'll eat when I come back."

"Okay."

"How are you feeling about the wedding?"

"I still dont feel good about having a wedding righ after a funeral, but atleast it will be a day after and not on the same day."

"Yeah, your dad did good by moving the funeral to Friday and not Saturday." I'm still not sure about the wedding happening so soon after the funeral but everyone seems to be in support of it.

I dont know what difference the change of day will make but the elders and their superstitions won. So we are getting married literally 24 hours after I bury my brother. Makhosi joins the others and they drive to the graveyard. I head to the kitchen and join the chopping gang. For the first time since this whole thing began I find myself fully immersed in the gossip happening in the kitchen. Theres even some ciders and wine making the rounds in tea cups and coffee mugs.

We wake up the next morning and prepare to lay our

brother to rest. I wake and take a shower before getting dressed. I put on my black mermaid midi boobtube dress with a cropped lace cover up. A red doek adds to the look as per the theme. I'll never understand funeral themes, but mum insisted we wear the red doeks because red was Mzwandile's favourite color. A pair of kitten heels finish the look. I finish bathing and head out to check on the preparations for the morning service. The pastors are here already and there are already some mourners in the tent. I walk down to the car when I see it parked outside the gate. I knocked on the window, Makhosi rubs his eyes and wakes up as his friends stir next to him and in the backseat. He opens the door and gets out. A smile covers his face as he looks at me from head to toe.

"You look good." I smile, well try to.

"Thanks. Let's go down to my uncles house so you can bath. It's just down the road."

"Okay. How are you feeling?"

"You know you've been asking me that everytime you see me?"

"Because I worry about you and I want to make sure you're Okay." I sigh and wrap my arms around his waist and lay my head on his chest.

"I know. Thank you."

"That's what husbands are for. Let's go bath before I stink up your outfit."

We walk down to my uncles house. I fill the 20l heater bucket with water and let it boil while I make breakfast for Makhosi and his friends. Thobi and Simz bring the scones and cupcakes and help me.serve these men. When they are done eating they take a bath one by one. When they are done they come out looking dapper in their suits.

The procession to the graveyard is slow but we get there eventually. We sit under the tiny tents and watch the service, my brothers last service before he

is laid in his final home. I hold on to my mum's hand with tears running down my face as the casket is lowered into the ground. This is it. This is where my brother will lay for the rest of eternity.

"Uphi umhlobo onjengoJesu?

Kakho, qha; kakho, qha;

Ongaphgilisa izifo zethu?

Kakho, qha; kakho, qha.

Uyazaz' izinsizi zethu

Noma ziphela noma cha.

Uphi umhlobo onjengoJesu?

Kakho, qha; kakho, qha.

Kakh' onjengaye nangobungcwele:

Kakho, qha; kakho, qha;

Nozithobisa okwakh' impela:

Kakho, qha; kakho, qha.

Ngeke amshiye omethembayo:

Kakho, qha; kakho, qha;

Ngek amalele nophendukayo:

Kakho, qha; kakho, qha.

Kakho omunye osindisayo:

Kakho, qha; kakho, qha;

Nasezulwini osamkelayo

Kakho, qha; kakho, qha."

My mum's favourite song accompanies the family as we are called up. We grab soil from a shovel and throw it in. One by one we say our final goodbyes. I watch with bloodshot eyes and tears streaming down as my brother is buried under all that soil.

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MAKHOSI

I dont think anyone likes funerals, I know I dont. Seeing Tivikele so heartbroken breaks my heart too. I hate being helpless. I mean I am supposed to be her man, her protector but I can't protect her from this, I cant take the pain away no matter how much I want to.

After the funeral we drive home. Tivikele and some girls bring us food. When we are done eating we go out to the car. Ndalo and I sit in the car and the others sit on crates under the tree we are parked under.

"Seriously, funerals are sad as fuck." Zizo says taking out some drinks from the cooler box and handing them out.

"Tell me about it." Melo says scrolling on his phone. "Look at this, there will be another funeral at this guys home." He shows us a picture of a man in bandages. He looks like he is lying in a hospital bed judging by the drips and oxygen on his face. Bruised as he might be, he looks familiar. I don't know where I know him from but I'm pretty sure I know him. My attention is taken away from him when I see where his picture was posted. It's a Camps Bay Residents on Facebook.

"Since when are you a resident of Camps Bay?" I ask Melo.

"One day I will be. I'm just manifesting that 40 million rand house." This one should join the chakra hun crew. Or is it chakra bros?

"So this is practice?" Ndalo asks and we laugh.

"You can laugh all you want, I wont host you at my house for your vacations. You'll see." He says and we laugh.

"Forget your imaginary house. What's wrong with

that guy?" Zizo asks. Melo goes back to his phone.

"They say he probably fell down Signal hill a few days ago. He didn't have any ID on him so right now he is a John Doe and they are trying to find his family." Melo tells us. I don't know why that somehow gives me goosebumps.

"Let me see the picture again." Melo hands me the phone and I look at the picture again. I might be jumping the gun a bit here but a spark of hope is ignited inside me. I don't know why yet, but this is worth a shot. I need to go to Cape Town. It will have to be after the wedding though.

"What do they say happened to him?"

"They say he probably fell down the hill while hiking or jogging. According to the post they found him there and they think he might have been there a while. Apparently he has a concussion and he's been unconscious since he was brought to the hospital."

"What are you thinking?" Ndalo asks interrupting my thoughts.

"I'm not sure yet." This might be a long shot and probably a useless process but *ithemba alibulali*, (hope doesn't kill), right?

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Unedited

It's been 20 hours since we buried my brother. We are back in Winston park preparing for the Khuzwayo's to come for umembeso. I still dont understand why we had to have the wedding today, but my voice was overshadowed so here we are. Outside the tent is being set up and people are busy. The caterer, that's my friend/ bridesmaid Thobi is already in the garage preparing to cook. I'm sure by the time the ceremony is over the food will be ready, I know mum will make sure of that.

Mum walks into my bedroom with a bowl in one hand and Hlelo in the other.

"Hey baby." She puts Hlelo on the bed and i give her a big hug. This one doesnt care about me when we are home. Even though we left them with their

grandparents, Sphetho drove them down yesterday together with Phila. I owe those two a lot. They are the best uncle and aunt I could ask for. Mum hands me the bowl. It's soft porridge with rama.,

"Eat. I noticed you didnt eat last night and you need all the strength for today." I sit up and take the bowl.

"Why do we have to do this today vele?" She sighs and picks up MJ.

"Trust me if it were up to me we would have postponed the wedding, but you know your uncles and their superstitions. They insisted on it."

"I guess it's better that the wedding is happening here and the funeral was there. Imagine one day we are crying and the next day we are dancing. It wouldnt be fair. And I'm sure Mzwandile would rise from the dead." She laughs.

"He'd like 'aningboni ne, aningboni', (you dont see me)." She says mimicking Mzwandile. Sad as we might be, I'm glad we can still laugh through the pain. I finish eating and put the bowl on the side table.

"Are you sure everything is ready for today?" I ask her.

"Everything is ready. Your dress is here already, the food is being prepped, the tent is up and the decor is being done, everything should be done by the time we have to start. And you know how I hate not being punctual." Trust her to tell me about punctuality when she's the one who planned all this.

"What about the bridesmaids dresses and the make up?"

"Simphiwe and the other girls are already on their way from Bahole's house. The make up artist is five minutes away, last time she called anyway and the dresses are already here. I just hope none of the girls gained weight during this past week." Drama.

Mum leaves and takes her babies with as soon as my friends bridesmaids arrive. The make up artist and her crew shows up and work starts. While they are busy with the girls make up I go and take a shower. When I'm done I sit down and get my makeup done. I put my dress on just as the singing

starts outside. The princess dress mum had designed for me is beautiful. I guess she figured since my white wedding dress is not the Princess gown she wanted she'll make wear one for the traditional wedding. It's a yellow and blue ankara print dress with a head wrap. My bridesmaids have on short A line dresses in the same print. The top parts of their dresses are different though, unique to their taste. Mum hurries into my room looking gorgeous.

"Mum, you do know this is MY wedding right? There's no need for you to look this good." She laughs and twirls around showing her mermaid, with the same yellow and blue Ankara print dress. My mum looks amazing.

"It's not too much is it?" She asks almost unsure of herself.

"Of course not." Simz says. "You're the mother of the bride. They must know you birthed umakoti wabo. Hhaybo, too much? Kuphi? (Where)." Everyone agrees with her and I see her confidence come back again.

"Okay then. I'll keep the dress." We all applaud and she twirls again. "Girls, can I talk to umakoti please." The girls follow each other out leaving us alone. "You look beautiful sthandwa sam. Turn around." I turn and all she can say is Wow. She dabs away a few tears from her eyes. "I cant believe you're getting married."

"Mum I'm already married."

"I know, but today just makes it real. Signing at home affairs is good too but today we tell labaphansi (the ancestors) that you're officially leaving home. Its bittersweet. Right now it feels like I'm losing my second child in less than a week." I take a few steps and cover the space between us. I take her hands in mine.

"I don't know how this feels for you but I promise you, you're not losing me. I might be changing my last name but I'll still be your daughter, nothings going to change there."

"I know, I know. I'm just emotional today. I never thought I'd be planning a wedding and a funeral on

the same week. I wish Mzwandile was here with his dramatics, I wish your day would not be marred by his passing. You should be able to celebrate your anniversary without having your brothers death anniversary in the same week." I bring her hands up to my lips and kiss them.

"I know. And that's why I wanted to postpone the wedding." I let go of her hand and grab a tissue on the side table and wipe her tears.

"I hope he is looking down on you and he will continue to be your best friend even in death." The door opens and Gcinile walks in.

"Okay enough crying, the groom is waiting outside." She says.

"Close the door and come here." She frowns, closes the door and comes to us. We stand there and hold hands. "I'm sure you noticed that you didnt have any women coming in to tell you how to behave emendvweni (in marriage)." I nod my head. "Its a traditional process that is done but I didn't want to do it for any of my daughters because I dont want

anyone telling you that you need to bekezela in your marriage, because that's bullshit. Your peace of mind comes first. If you are not happy you cannot bekezela for shit. I don't want you being told that you don't ask a man where he's been when he comes home at 3 in the morning because you have a right to ask, especially if you've been sitting up worried out of your mind, you have a right to ask. I will however tell you this, respect your husband, I dont care how independent you are, umuzi can only have inhloko eyodwa, (a house can only have one leader.) I know you are a 21st century independent woman, but respecting your husband and looking to him to lead you doesnt make you stupid or foolish, if you know you and you know your strength a man leading you will not sway you in any way. Rest in your womanhood. And never, ever fight for a man. If he cheats, dont go chasing after the other woman and making a fool of yourself. Leave. If you're not ready to leave, cheat back."

"MUM!" Gcinile and I say in unison. Most mothers are telling their kids to kneel down and pray for the

demon that would be plaguing their marriage, but not my mother. She says I should cheat back. What kind of mess is this?

"Dont mum me. Walking away from marriage is easy for some and for some it's a process. The most important thing though, know that before anything else, before you're a wife, before you're a mother, you're a woman. Your happiness and peace of mind is very important. If you're happy, your husband will be happy and your kids will be happy too. Dont forget to fill up your cup so you can pour for your family. You can never pour from an empty cup, so make sure you are happy first before you worry about anyone else. Understand?" We both nod our head. "Good. Let's go get you married."

I watch the two of them walk out. I turn to the mirror hanging on the wall and look at myself. Not to be cocky or anything but I make a beautiful bride. I pick up a picture of me and all my siblings that's sitting on the chest of drawers. We were all so happy here, it was a few days before Mzwandile went to China. I guess that whole week was supposed to be his

farewell week. I pick up another photo we took after he came back. He had come to visit me in Joburg for a weekend. We took a picture in Sandton square, right in front of the Nelson Mandela statue. Corny, I know, but Mzwandile was corny. If I'd known then that I'd bury him a year later, maybe I would have hugged him a little more, i would have told him I loved him every day and every hour. If only i could turn back time.

I hear a knock on the door before dad comes in.

"I know brides are supposed to be late but this is too much." I turn around and take a deep breath.

"I'm ready."

"Okay then. Let's go." I take his outstretched hand and we walk out.

The singing, the dancing and the positive vibe going around is beautiful. There are two songs being sang, it's like a competition really with both families wanting their song to be the loudest. I see him in between the steel bars of the gate. He is wearing a shirt made of the same ankara print of my dress and

a pair of dark blue chinos. He looks handsome. His shirt is the same as the one MJ is wearing. And Hlelo has a fluffy princes dress on just like mine. If anyone would have told me that one day I would be part of the cliche of matching clothes with your partner and kids, I would have laughed my ass off. But here I am, about to fully give myself to a man. I'm sure God is having the last laugh.

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MAKHOSI

Who would have thought a lousy stupid bet would lead me to this moment. I know I wouldn't have. All I wanted was a bit of fun, and some easy money, instead I got a family. I fell, hard. If ever there is such a thing as rock bottom when it comes to being in love then I'm sure I hit that a long time ago. And there is no way I'm leaving this place. I'm going to spend the rest of my life loving this woman.

I see her clearly as soon as the gates open. That one night in the club when I saw her floating in will forever be engraved in my memory forever. And this moment right here, will be right next to that memory. We are led to the backyard where the gifting will take place.

"You look beautiful." I whisper to her as soon as we are seated.

"Thank you. You dont look too shabby yourself."

When the speeches start my head keeps looking at the entrance. I'm expecting Melokuhle to show up any moment now. His flight from Cape Town landed about thirty minutes ago. It took some convincing for him to fly to Cape Town after the funeral yesterday. If I could have I would have done it myself, but I wasnt ready to tempt fate, so Melokuhle went to Cape Town with Tivikele's toothbrush so he can have a DNA test done to see if the guy in the photo is really who I think it is. I pray it is.

When my family starts giving out the gifts we brought Melo shows up. My heart starts beating put of my chest. He nods his head and joins us where

we are sitting. Since Tivikele is next to me he can't tell me everything now so we'll have to wait a bit. When we are done with the gifts we head to the tent.

"Babe, I need the bathroom." I tell Tivikele. Se calls one of the kids running around and tells them to show me the toilets. I get up and follow the kid to some mobile toilets on the far end of the yard. I get in and pee. More like force myself to pee. When I get out Melokuhle is standing outside.

"Hey, how did it go?" I ask him.

"I still say your assumption is a bit crazy but I spoke to the doctor on duty and they agreed to have me do the DNA test. I had to push a rush on it so I should have the results by the end of business today."

"That's good. So what did the doctor say? Will he be Okay?"

"They are not sure yet. They said when he came in he had some swelling in the brain, he had lost a lot of blood and he was on the verge of having hypothermia. The doctor said him being alive was a miracle really. But they are hopeful. They allowed the

swelling to go down in the brain and then they drained some blood from the brain. Now all they can do is wait." I sigh and rub my eyes. "You do know this is a long shot right? This man could be a stranger."

"I know. That's why I havent said anything to anyone. I have nothing to lose by finding out right?"

"True. But leave room for disappointment."

"Trust me there is plenty of that. Let's go before they say I ran away."

We head back to the tent and take our seats.

"Is everything okay?" My wife asks. I take her hand and kiss it.

"Perfect. I just married the girl of my dreams, what more can a man ask for." She smiles and blushes. I can't believe I get to spend the rest of my life with her.

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unedited

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"Its a match."

"What?"

"Its a match. The DNA test. It's a match." Melo whispers in my ear over the loud music that's playing.

"I'll be right back." I tell Tivikele before following Melo out of the tent. We find a quiet place with less people. "Man are you sure about this?"

"I just got the call now. The DNA is match. The guy is Mzwandile." Melo says. I feel my heart beating fast. How do I even begin to tell Tivikele this? I know she'll be happy but it's not something you can just blurt out. Especially in the middle of wedding reception.

"Wow. So who was buried? It means there is a fresh

grave belonging to a stranger under the name Mzwandile Majola."

"Tell me about it. So how are you going to do this?"

"I think I should speak to Bahole and Mabutho first. They need to confirm this before the rest of the family is told."

"You did hear me say D.N.A tests match right?"

"I know. I know. Lets go."

We head back to the tent. I see Bahole walking to the gate with a woman. Must be his girlfriend. I decide to follow him as Melo goes back to the tent. I stand by the gate as he says his goodbyes to the lady. He walks back up and finds me standing by the gate.

"Mkhwenyana, shouldn't you be partying with the others."

"I should be. I need to talk to you about something."
We stand against the wall fence.

"Khuluma ndoda, (speak man), are you getting cold feet?" I chuckle and shake my head.

"Its a little too late for that dont you think?"

"Just checking. So what's up?" I take out my phone and go to my gallery. I find the screenshot Melo sent me and show it to Bahole. "Who is he?"

"He is a John doe." He brings the phone close to his face like he is noticing something.

"He looks familiar." He says. "What's wrong with him?"

"He was found around Signal Hill in Cape Town. The hospital doesn't know what happened to him but when he came in he was bruised and swollen all over. This picture was taken a couple of days after he was found and no one claimed him."

"Okay so what has that got to do with you?" He asks handing me my phone back.

"I had some suspicion, Mzwandile's car lost control a few meters down the same hill right?"

"Right. Where are you going with this?"

"Well, hear me out. You didn't do a DNA test to confirm that the person in the car was Mzwandile right?"

"No. We didn't need to. Some of his personal belongings fell out of the car when it rolled. His work ID was found a few meters from the car. Makhosi, what are trying to say?" I show him the picture again.

"I think that is Mzwandile." I see his chest moving up and down rapidly as he looks at the photo. He looks up again and his eyes are turning red.

"This is not the time to be making jokes Makhosi. I like you, I really do, but don't play like this." I take the phone and show him the photos Melo took while he was in Cape Town. One of them shows the man's arm with tattoos. And two of those tattoos are Hlelo and MJ's birthdays. Hlelo's birthday has a little fairy next to it and MJ's has a football.

"Look closely at the arm. Look at the dates." He slumps down onto the ground with tears running down his eyes. I've never seen a big man like him crying, but I would be too if I just found out the brother I buried is alive.

"The fairy." He says between sobs. "My brother is alive." I sit down next to him. "He is alive." As reality

has just set in he quickly stands up again and wipes his tears. "We have to go to Cape Town." I stand up too.

"I'll book the flights. I take it I'm booking for everyone?"

"No. Just Mabutho and I. I need to make sure this is real."

"I'm coming with and so is Tivikele. I can't hide this from her."

"Fine. I'll go get Mabutho. You get Tivikele." We part ways and I head back to the tent while he goes to the house. I hope I can find a flight. I find Tivikele with her friends. I pull her aside.

"What's wrong? Where do you keep disappearing to?" She asks.

"I was making preparations for our mini honeymoon. It's almost time. I need you to go and change then pack a few bikinis then we can go."

"Bikinis? Where are we going?"

"Cape Town."

"Okay, I'll go pack now." She turns to her friends and they go into the house giggling.

I go online and find a flight to Cape Town that leaves in about three hours. Enough time for us to get to the airport before check in is closed. I book four tickets immediately. As soon as I get confirmation I go find my friends.

"Mkhwenyana." Ndalo starts. "Where have you been?"

"Around. Listen, I am taking my wife to Cape Town."

"Dont tell me you're still on that John Doe plug." Jobe says.

"Actually, the John Doe has a name now. Mzwandile." They open their mouths in shock except for Melo.

"What do you mean? We buried a john doe?" Ndalo asks.

"It looks like it. Melo will explain everything, mina I have to go. I'll speak to you guys later." I see Bahole coming out of the house with an overnight bag

followed by Mabutho. I see Bahole looking around before his eyes land on me. He nods and heads to the gate. I follow them. I find them putting their bags in the car.

"Where is your wife?" Bahole asks.

"Probably packing an entire summer wardrobe." I tell him.

"I'll go get her." Mabutho says and leaves.

"Where is your bag?" Bahole asks.

"At the guest house. I'll buy what I need there." He shrugs his shoulders and puts his hands in his pockets. Five minutes later Mabutho comes out with Tivikele running behind him.

"You're an idiot Mabutho." She says behind him. He throws her bag in the boot. "If anything breaks there, you're dead." She tells him. I would butt in but I have learned to stay out of sibling fights.

We get into the car and Bahole drives off.

"Where are they going?" She asks me.

"Cape Town. I'll tell you everything when we get

there." She crosses her arms and frowns. Her eyes keep darting from me to her brothers in the front seat.

"What the heck is going on?" She asks. No one gives her an answer so she clicks her tongue and looks outside the window.

We get to the airport and check in just in time. The whole flight is rather slow. I guess that's what happens when one is anxious. We get to Cape Town and find a car already waiting for us. I guess Mabutho or Bahole took care of that cause I know I didnt. We get in the car and Bahole drives. I send him the address of the hospital and he punches it into the GPS.

"Where are we going?" Tivikele asks. I guess this is a good time to tell her everything before she faints at the hospital.

"Babe, I have to tell you something."

"Okay, what is it?"

"Mzwandile might be alive." She smiles and looks at her brothers.

"Is this a joke?" I take my phone out and show her the tattoo. "That's Mzwandile's tattoo. Where did you get it?" I scroll to the next full picture showing Mzwandile's face.

"That's him." She looks at her brothers then looks back at me. She hands me the phone.

"We buried Mzwandile yesterday. If this is a joke, its tasteless, even for you." She crosses her arms on her chest and faces the front.

"Babe...."

"No. I dont want to hear it. This is a bad joke and it's not funny."

I want to try and convince her that it's not a joke but Bahole shakes his head and I let her be. Twenty minutes later we pulm up to the New Somerset Hospital. We go in and head straight to reception.

"Good evening. Can I help you?" The nurse asks.

"Hi, I am looking for Dr Allen." I'm not even sure if this doctor is on night duty or not.

"I'll page her." She presses a button on the

switchboard. "Paging Allen, Dr Allen to reception. Dr Allen to Reception." She hangs up and looks at me. "She's on her way." I dont know how she knows that, she might be sleeping in her office for all we know, but okay. "You can take a seat." We sit down on the benches and wait. Tivikele is on her phone, completely oblivious to what's happening around her. I'm sure she's just trying to zone everything and everyone out.

A beautiful white woman comes down the corridor in her white coat. She walks past us and heads to the nurse at reception. The nurse tells her we are the one's looking for her. She looks at us before coming over. Bahole, Mabutho and I stand up.

"Hi, I'm Dr Allen. Can I help you?" She says with her hand out for a handshake. I shake her hand then she proceeds to shake Bahole and Mabutho's hands.

"Hi Dr, my name is Makhosi Khuzwayo, I believe you've met my friend, Melokuhle, he was here yesterday about the John Doe."

"Oh yes, he requested a sample for a DNA test."

"Yes he did. And he said the tests came back positive?"

"Yes they did. Are you related to the John Doe perhaps."

"Yes. Can we see him?" Mabutho says impatiently.

"Of course. Follow me." The Doctor leaves with Mabutho and Bahole behind her. I wait for Tivikele to stand up but she doesn't.

"Babe let's go."

"You said we were going on a mini honeymoon. Hospitals don't count." She says looking at me like she's ready to kill me.

"I know Sthandwa sam and we will go on our honeymoon. But for now we need to go see your brother."

"My brother is dead Makhosi. Hard as it is I am slowly coming to terms with him being dead. This strange man you want me to meet cannot be my brother."

"Look, let's just go and see him and see if it's really

him or not. If it's not him then we have nothing to lose."

"Nothing to lose? Makhosi did you see how Mabutho and Bahole are right now? To you there might be nothing to lose but to them, if that man is not Mzwandile it will be like losing him all over again. Did you see how they were when they came back home from seeing his body. They wouldnt even let us see him, you could see the trauma in their eyes and now you went and gave them hope. They already feel guilty for not being there for him, I dont know why you would do this, today of all days." I let out a slow deep sigh and sit down next to her.

"I know this seems scary. And a long shot. But the DNA tests matched yours. I took your toothbrush and hand Melo request a DNA test. Unless your father was a rolling stone with kids all over the place, then that man is your brother."

Mabutho comes rushing down the passage. We both stand up and meet him halfway. His eyes are red, like he has been crying. He stops walking and bends down with his hands on his knees. He gets up again

and puts his hands on his head.

"See what I mean?" Tivikele says like she wants to say 'I told you so.' Guilt washes over me. If this man is not Mzwandile then I will have done the dumbest thing I've ever done in the world. "Mabutho, let's just go home." Tivikele says.

"Its him." He whispers. Tears run down his eyes as he holds Tivikele by her upper arms. "Its him Tee, our brother is alive." A wave of relief fills me up. Mabutho brings a numb Tivikele in for a hug. She stands there like a statue. "Its him. I need to call the parents." Mabutho says taking out his phone.

"Baby let's go see him." She says nothing. I hold her hand and and pull her down the passage. We find Dr Allen outside a ward talking to a nurse. She smiles and points to a ward on the left. We walk in and find Bahole sitting on a chair with Mzwandile's hand in his. With his head bowed, we hear sobs coming from him. Tivikele takes slow steps to the bed. Bahole stands up allowing Tivikele to sit down.

I walk out of the ward just as Dr Allen walks away.

"Doctor, a moment please." She stops and turns around.

"I'm sorry to disturb you."

"You're not. Can I help with Anything?"

"Do you know what happened to him?" She shakes her head.

"No. The police are still trying to piece the pieces together. My guess is he fell down during a hike or a run on the hill."

"How badly is he hurt? Will he be Okay?"

"It's hard to tell if he'll be Okay or not. Like I told Melo, when he came in, his brain was swollen and he had some hemorrhaging. We weren't sure he would make it through the first day, but he is here now, the swelling went down and we were able to drain most of the blood. He also has a concussion, that's what caused the swelling and hemorrhaging." Okay something doesn't make sense.

"If he fell down the hill then where did the concussion come from?" I ask her.

"Well right now all we have are speculations. Until he wakes up and tells us what happened, all we can do is speculate. I'd love to chat some more Mr Khuzwayo but my patients are waiting for me." She looks at her watch, smiles and leaves me standing there.

I take a seat on the small bench in the passage. The easy part is done, we found him. Now the hard part, he has to wake up. He really does or else all this will be pointless. I really pray he wakes up.

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I'm pretty sure these white people have never seen these many black people before. It's like the entire Nkandla and Eswatini descended on this hospital like a plague. No one would believe that this was really Mzwandile until they saw for themselves. Even relatives who were preparing to go home decided to come here instead.

Mum has been stuck next to Mzwandile's side since she got here. Dad ordered another DNA test just to be sure this is really Mzwandile and they matched. To say everyone is over the moon would be an understatement. But now the question everyone has is 'who did we bury?'

"Baby, hurry up, we have to go back to the hospital." I put my shoes on getting ready to go but this husband of mine is still sleeping. I shake him a bit and he stirs. "Makhosi, wake up." He takes the pillow and covers his head miming something. I pull the pillow away. He smiles.

"Morning baby." I reach over and give him a kiss before standing up and fixing my dress.

"We have to go." He raises his upper body and leans on his elbows.

"You do realise we only got here four hours ago. We are lucky they let us check in that early. We need sleep baby." I stop brushing my hair and turn away from the round mirror on the wall.

"Fine. If you are tired then you can sleep and I'll go. I'll take an uber." He sighs and throws the comforter off of him.

"No. I'll go take a shower. Please order breakfast, I'm starving." He gets off the bed and drags his feet to the bathroom. I pick up the hotel phone and order

room service. After making sure my hair is brushed I take my phone and call MamKhuzwayo. I'm sure by now she is tired of watching the kids.

"Makoti. How are you?" She says after picking up the phone.

"I'm good ma how are you?"

"We are good. How is your brother?"

"He is still unconscious. But doctors are hopeful."

"That's good. We will keep praying for him, I have some women from church who will pray for him too."

"Thank you. Are you still in Durban?"

"We are. But Sphetho is driving us home."

"That's good. How are my babies?" She chuckles.

"Well Hlelo is discovering new things to try and break and MJ is always hungry. But they are good."

"Thank you ma. And I'm sorry I keep dumping them on you like this."

"Oh no, dont be sorry, I love watching my grandkids. I've been begging these kids to give me some one but they are too focused on their careers. I love watching them. Wena just be with your brother, ubaba and I will make sure the babies are okay."

"Thank you ma. We'll keep you updated."

"No problem. Stay safe."

"Bye ma." I hang up just as there is a knock on the door.

I open the door and the waiter pushes the trolley in. I give him his tip and he leaves. Makhosi walks out of the bathroom with a towel around his waist. I set the table up while he lotions. When he is done he puts the clothes he had on yesterday back on. How did he get me to pack a bag but he didn't? Men! He takes a seat and immediately digs into his food.

"So I have questions." He looks up from his plate and stops chewing.

"O-kay?"

"When did you find out my brother might still be alive?" He drinks his coffee, the way he looks nervous you'd think he was sitting in front of Judge Zondo being questioned about state capture.

"After the funeral. I saw a post on a Facebook group that Melo is in they were looking for relatives or someone who knows him. He looked familiar even though he was bruised and swollen. So I asked Melo to come here and have a DNA test done."

"Is that why he came late to the wedding?"

"Yes."

"How did he get a DNA sample without anyone asking questions?"

"Cause I took your toothbrush." I take a napkin and throw it at him and he laughs.

"I thought someone stole my toothbrush and was planning to bewitch me with it."

"Technically speaking, I did steal it. But why would

anyone want to bewitch you."

"Eh, you never know. And when did you tell Bahole and Mabutho?"

"I actually told Bahole and he told Mabutho." This little bromance that's been brewing between these three, I'm not sure if I should be worried about it or not. I mean on one hand it's cute that my brothers and my husband get along, but also what if they team up against me? Okay maybe I am being paranoid. But I am used to my brothers hating my boyfriends. So I should consider myself lucky they actually care about my husband.

After breakfast we get ready to leave.

"We need to pass by the shops and get you some clothes." He looks at his shirt and smiles.

"What's wrong with my wedding shirt?" He asks running his hands down his shirt.

"It was nice and cute yesterday. Today, not so much. People might think you are on your way to your

wedding and I'm the girl you're leaving in the house to go marry someone else. You need to change." He throws his head back laughing.

"Fine. And yesterday the three of us were looking like some schathamiya boy band." Good thing we came here when it was already late. Imagine the stares we would have gotten.

I request an uber since Bahole has the rental car. Two minutes before the uber arrives we leave the room and go down to reception. When the uber arrives we get in and drive to V&A Waterfront. We find an H&M and get a couple of shirts and a pair of jeans. I request another uber and we head to the hospital. Makhosi changes his shirt in the backseat.

When we get to the hospital we find most of the family already here. We head straight to his ward and find the bed empty and a nurse making the bed. My heart starts racing and I go numb standing in the same spot.

"I'm sorry, hi, where is the man who was in this bed?" Makhosi asks her.

"He was moved to a private ward." The nurse answers. I close my eyes and breath out. I hear Makhosi sighing next to me.

"Do you know which ward he is in?" Makhosi asks.

"Yes. I'll show you." The nurse volunteers. She walks before us and leads us to the private wards. This side its quiet and really private. She shows us his ward and leaves.

We walk to the ward and open the door. We find the whole family filling up the not so big room. I'm pretty sure this is against the rules. They are softly singing Nothando Hlophe and Spirit of Praises Impilo yami. We stand by the door and join in. When the song ends my grandmother starts praying.

"Merciful God, miracle working God we humble

ourselves before you and give thanks for saving my grandsons life. You said it in your word Lord that if we come to you and ask you will hear our prayers and answer us, and now we are asking you Lord, please wake him up. You've already brought him this far, now we ask you Lord to bring him back to us. Heavenly father we ask for all this in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen." Everyone says Amen and we open our eyes.

After the prayer some of the family members walk out to the sit in the waiting area. We decide to go join them since mum and dad are busy talking to Mzwandile. The doctor says he can hear us and we've been talking to him since we got here. I pray he really does hear us and comes back to us.

"Mkhwenyana." Gogo says greeting Makhosi. "Come sit next to me." She says with a smile on her face. I hear chuckles and this one goes to sit next to her. Now I'm left standing. Has Makhosi forgotten who

he is married to? I sit down next to Gcinile and Musa.

"Bahole tells us you're the one who found Mzwandile." Gogo says talking to Makhosi.

"Only by luck." He answers.

"You call it luck, I call it God working his miracle." My aunt says.

"That's true. We would have went on with our lives thinking we buried him meanwhile he is here. I wonder what really happened." Babomncane says.

Bahole walks in followed by two police officers.

"Family, Detective Mxenge and Seargent Ndungane. They have questions." Shouldn't it be the other way around? I mean we are the ones who are supposed to ask how they ended up giving us someone else's remains.

"Good morning, Do you perhaps know what Mzwandile was doing up on Signal Hill?" Tell me this is a joke. There is no way he just asked that. I look around me and everyone is just as shocked. That

time the great Detective is waiting for an answer.

"You do know most of us don't stay in Cape Town right?" Mabutho asks. The Detective looks at his colleague waiting for him to save him.

"I have a question." Makhosi says. "How did you figure the person in the car was Mzwandile?"

"His ID was in the bag that fell out of the car when it rolled. There was also a work ID which was partially burnt."

"You didn't do a DNA test to determine his real identity?" Musa says.

"Yes but the family identified him as well." He says defending himself.

"Technically speaking we didn't identify him, you told us it was him and we believed you. And yes, to some extent we can take the blame too because we were grieving and all we wanted was to bury our brother but Musa is right, there is more you could have done to determine his identity." Bahole answers.

"True, and now we have spent thousands burying someone we dont even know. Now we have to explain to the insurance people and we have to dig up that person we dont know who is now buried in our family cemetery. Do you see where we are going with this?" Gcinile asks. I'm impressed she is keeping it together but I also just want this questioning to be over.

Sure the police made a mistake and it would be easy to say they must pay for it but we also didn't do enough to make sure we are burying the right person. There is enough blame to go around. We see a couple of doctors run down the passage. I get curious and stand up to see where they are going. I see them going into Mzwandile's room. I feel heart palpitations as I take steps towards the room.

I open the door slowly and walk in. I see mum and dad huddled up in the corner watching the Doctors work on him. One doctor is shining a light in is eyes

and the other is busy writing something in his file. I expect him to close his eyes again but he blinks a couple of times. I hope this is what I think it is. I walk to my parents and dad holds me in his other arm and we watch as the doctors poke and probe my brother. I keep my eyes on his. He keeps looking around like he is not sure where he is. His eyes land on me and he smiles. Probably just my imagination but I swear I saw a smile. Even with the pipe deep in his throat, I'm sure I saw a smile.

He closes his eyes and opens them again. He is still staring at me. Okay I'm pretty sure that was a wink. Or maybe I need to stop letting my imagination run wild.

"Okay, we will run some more tests but so far so good. It doesn't seem there is any injury to his spine, and his legs seem to be working since flinched when we ran a pen under his feet. We will have to do a Cat Scan to be sure the swelling and bleeding in his

brain has gone down completely. But right now, it looks like all is in order." Dr Allen says.

"Can he breathe on his own?" Dad asks.

"Well Dr Majola, we will remove the pipe and put on an oxygen mask instead. For now we will take him to get a cat scan and an xray. The nurse will come and prep him." She says and walks out with her colleague behind her.

Mum wipes her tears and walks to the bed. She holds Mzwandile's hand.

"Hi baby, I'm so happy to see your eyes." He looks at her and I see it again. The smile. I want to tell him that theres a grave with his name on it but I figure he is too fragile for that right now. It will probably be an inside joke sometime in the future, but for now, he is here, and he is alive. That's all we should focus on right now. And now that he is up, he can tell us what truly happened.

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"When is our honeymoon starting?" This does not count as a honeymoon. I want a proper honeymoon, and this ain't it.

"Arent we on honeymoon?" He cant be serious. I turn around and cross my arms on his chest with my chin resting on them.

"This is not a honeymoon Khuzwayo. I want a proper honeymoon." He chuckles.

"Okay, how about this, after the wedding, once we are sure everything is back in order and Mzwandile is on his way to recovery we will go on honeymoon."

"Okay. That's fair."

"Remind me again, why did the gogo's decide to have the weddings literally seven days apart?"

"Probably because they wanted to get it over and done with. Plus this is the first wedding for both families so they want everything to be perfect."

"I get that, but why are we getting married in Stellenbosch?"

"You know what I think. I think they are living vicariously through us." My phone rings on the side table. I grab it and mums name flashes on the screen.

"Mummy."

"Where are you? Mzwandile wants to see you?" "He can talk?"

"Yes. He is a bit slow but you can hear him. Are you still at the hotel?"

"Yes. I didnt know we were supposed to be there this early?"

"No, we weren't. I just wanted to be with him."

Mothers and their sons. Its not even seven o'clock yet and she is there already. But then again she did

'bury' him just a few days ago, so she just wants to make sure she is not dreaming.

"Okay. We'll be there soon."

"Good. Bring me breakfast." She hangs up. Now I'm doubting Mzwandile is the one who wants to see me.

"Let's go take a shower, we have to go to the hospital." I get off the bed and walk to the bathroom. I feel his eyes on me. I stand by the door and turn to look at him.

"What?"

"You look yummy." I should have put a gown on. Or not. I wiggle my butt trying to twerk, and fail. He laughs at me.

"Get up." I get in the bathroom and open the water in the shower. I wash my face in the sink while the water heats up.

Makhosi walks in and stands behind me. He kisses my shoulder and I can feel his hard on poking me.

"You're beautiful, you know that?" I look up and find him staring at me through the mirror. I turn around and wrap my arms around his neck. I pull him down and kiss him.

"I dont think I've said this to you but, ngyabonga Khuzwayo. (Thank you.) I know we did not start on the smoothiest path but we are here now and we are making it work. And inspite of everything you've been a constant anchor in my life and I'm truly truly grateful for that. You didn't have to do half the things you've done, especially when it comes to my family but you keep showing up for me and for my family. And now you just 'rose' my brother from the 'dead', I cant ask for anything more. Thank you for loving me with all my flaws." He smiles and picks me up and puts me on top of the basin. He stands between my legs and kisses me.

"I am the one who should be thanking you. For giving me another chance, like you said, our start wasnt the smoothest, but you allowed me back into your life and our daughters life and gave me a chance to right

my wrongs. I love you Sthandwa sam."

"I love you too." He kisses me while he runs his hands on my thighs all the way up to my butt. My phone rings just as things get hot and heavy. I can bet a lifetime's worth of my salary that that is my mother. Makhosi stops kissing me and chuckles.

"Let's take a shower before your mother sends the calvary." He helps me down and we get in the shower. One of my pet peeves is shower sex. I dont get how people enjoy it when they are all slippery and wet. But I guess today I'll find out. This one cannot start something and not finish it. He puts shower gel on the loafer and washes my back. He turns me around and a sneak peek down there tells me he is just as horny as I am.

I hold his dick in my hand and he stops and looks at me.

"We will be late." He says trying to breath.

"Well, hurry up then." I turn around, spread my legs and hold on to the rail. He runs his dick between my ass cheeks all the way down to my clit before I feel him slowly insert himself inside me. His strokes start slow allowing my body to fully accommodate him. When he is fully in he starts pumping into me. I rub my clit while his strokes get faster. I feel a wave of ecstasy hit me before my body convulsed. He keeps going till I feel him spill his seed inside me. Good thing I'm on birth control.

When he pulls out we take our shower as quickly as we can. We get out, get dressed and head out. I find four missed calls from my mother. I call her back as soon as we get in the rental car.

"Why are you not picking up my calls?" Four missed calls in ten minutes. So much drama.

"I was in the shower."

"And your husband couldn't answer the phone." I keep quiet waiting for him to continue. "Oh I get it."

"What breakfast do you want?" I hear her click her tongue.

"None. My other daughter who takes showers alone already got me breakfast. Bye bye." She hangs up. This womans dramatics never end.

"What did she say?"

"She doesn't want my breakfast. I'm hungry so let's go get food anyway." We go past V&A Waterfront and get breakfast then head to the hospital. We head straight to Mzwandile's ward. There are less people than yesterday, I'm sure the white people are happy about that.

We get to the ward and mum gives me a nasty look. Dads not here, it's just her and Gcinile. Mum is feeding Mzwandile what looks like soft porridge. Is he even allowed to eat so soon?

"Good morning family." I give my sister a hug and then give the drama queen a hug too before hugging

my brother.

"MJ is too young to be replaced by another child." She says looking from me to Makhosi. I told you, drama. Makhosi laughs. I ignore her and focus on my brother.

"How are you feeling?" Mum wipes the side of his mouth.

"I.... I'm..... alive." He says with a faint smile on his face.

"Your mother says you wanted to see me. What's up?" His eyes move from me to mum then back to me again.

"What is so secretive that you have to discuss without me?" Mum asks with her arms crossed on her chest. Gcinile gets up from the chair and takes her bag.

"Mine, I won't question your secrets. Musa and i are going to the beach. So I'll see you later brother." She gives Mzwandile a hug and then walks out.

"Wait for me. Clearly I'm not wanted here."

Mzwandile tries to laugh but his bruises wont allow him. He holds on to his abdomen while trying to hold in his laugh. Mum grabs her bag and leaves with Gcinile.

"Okay, let me give you some space too." Makhosi says standing up.

"No." Mzwandile says. "Sit." Makhosi sits back down.
"I..... I..... need....your help."

"Okay. What do you need?"

"I need..... I need you.... tofind Kwanda." That name sounds a bit familiar. I know it from somewhere.

"Who is Kwanda?" Makhosi and I look at each other.

"My boss." I knew that name was familiar. Right now, in my head I am doing additions and subtractions. But before I get way ahead of myself let me hear him out.

"Okay, I know Kwanda Mkhize right?" He nods his head. "Alright, what do you need from her? Your job?" He shakes his head.

"I need..... you to find.....her.... and keep..... keep her... safe." Now I'm confused.

"Why? Mzwandile what happened to you?" He takes the oxygen mask and put it back in his mouth then draws in a few deep breaths before removing it again.

"Her husband.... he is... dangerous... you have ...to find her." I hope the husband didnt do this to my brother. I dont know him but if he did, I swear he will regret it.

"Did the husband do this to you?" Makhosi asks. Mzwandile nods his head. I feel anger rising from the pits of my soul.

"Why would he do this to you? Were you sleeping with his wife?" Makhosi asks the question that's running around my brain.

"She... she is ... pregnant." Amen.

"And let me guess, its your child?"

"Please.... find her." His breathing is way too fast for his own good. It's like he is nervous or is having a panic attack. Clearly this is important to him. I wonder why he didn't ask his brothers.

"Okay, tell you what, give me her number, I'll call her and ask her to come here." He shakes his head.

"No.... you have.... to ... go to her."

"Okay, Tee will go to your office and talk to her. See if she is okay or not." Makhosi tells him. He relaxes a bit and puts the mask back on.

"Yeah, I think I should go now. It's still early." He nods his head and rests back on the bed. I give him a kiss on the forehead before walking out with Makhosi behind me.

"Gcinile did say he was tapping that ass." Makhosi laughs and puts his arm around my shoulders.

"How did she know?"

"Apparently she was too distraught about just an employee dying."

"You saw her?"

"She was at the funeral. She spoke on behalf of his colleagues."

"Now I'm curious to see her."

We drive to Mzwandile's work place. I've never been here but I've seen it in pictures. We park the car and head in. We find a lady in reception. She looks up when we stand in front of her desk.

"Good morning, can I help you?" She asks running her eyes from me to Makhosi and back again. I know we aren't dressed professionally but SHE could be a little more professional and stop looking at us like we are hobos.

"Hi. We'd like to see Miss Kwanda Mkhize."

"MRS! Kwanda Mkhize. May I ask what this is about?"

"I'd like to discuss a business proposal I sent to her. I'm in Cape Town for a few more hours so I'd like to discuss the contract with her."

"Ok, and you are?"

"Nomzamo Khuzwayo. T.N.M Technologies."

"We dont have business with T.N.M Technologies."

"You dont. MRS Mkhize does. Will you let her know we are here or will you keep interrogating us."

Makhosi says. She grabs the phone and dials an extension.

"Mrs Mkhize, there is a Nomzamo Khuzwayo here to see you. She says she is from T.N.M Technologies." She keeps quiet and listens to her boss speaking on the other end of the line. "Ok. I'll let her up." She hangs up the phone. "Fifteenth floor, second office on your right." So professional.

We go to the lift and Makhosi presses the button and we wait for the lift.

"That was an experience." I say. The lift pings and we get in.

"So how exactly are we supposed to do this? Do we get in and tell her we know you've been cheating on your husband and now you are pregnant with your side dish's baby? Will that work?" Makhosi asks.

"My brother is not a side dish."

"Technically speaking, he is." Oh God, I cant believe my sweet innocent little brother is a side dish. That name alone just makes me want to puke. A boyfriend, yes. Side dish, that sounds so wrong.

The lift opens on the fifteenth floor and we go out. The office is easy to find. We knock on the door and a man tells us to come in. Makhosi opens the door and goes in first. I go in and Mrs Mkhize is with a man. She's still as beautiful as I remember.

"Hi. I'm sorry we didn't know you were in a meeting. We can come back later." The man stands up and extends his hand for a handshake. He starts with Makhosi and moves to me.

"Please, don't worry about it, I was on my way out anyway. I just thought I'd bring my wife some breakfast. She needs the nutrition. Especially now that she's carrying precious cargo." Wow, okay. I'm not sure if I would be comfortable with my husband telling strangers I am pregnant. And from the look on Kwanda's face, she doesn't seem to like it either.

"Congratulations." Makhosi tells him.

"Thank you. Sihle Mkhize. That's my wife Kwanda."

"It's nice to meet you. Makhosi Khuzwayo and this is my wife Tivikele Khuzwayo."

"Nice to meet you. Let me leave you to your business." He walks over to his wife and gives her a kiss on the cheek. "I'll see you later." He turns back to us. "It's nice to meet you boKhuzwayo. I hope it's not the last time." He says and walks out. I'm glad Makhosi spearheaded that conversation. That was

just awkward in my books.

"I'm sorry about that. My husband is just in a great mood." Kwanda says and clears her desk of the food.

"Pregnancy will do that to a man. Congratulations by the way." She looks rather uncomfortable about this whole pregnancy thing. I would be too if my side dish was the one who scored instead of my husband.

"Thank you. So what can I do for you?" We sit down on the visitors chairs.

"Uhm... I know this will sound awkward but, my brother is worried about you." Her face spells confusion.

"I'm sorry, why would you brother be worried about me?"

"My name is actually Tivikele Majola." Realization dawn's on her.

"You're Mzwandile's sister?"

"Yes, and he is worried about you."

"Wow, okay. He never told me you have a gift." Oh my God, she thinks I speak to the dead. Makhosi tries to conceal his laughter.

"I dont have a gift. Mzwandile is alive. He is in the hospital."

"If this is a joke it's not funny. We were at your home on Saturday burying him." I guess she is also a doubting Thomas. And there is one way to deal with those.

"Its not a joke. Tell you what, let's go to the hospital and you will see him for yourself."

"Fine." Okay that was easy. I thought she'd put up a fight. She gets up and grabs her bag on the coat hanger. "Let's go." Okay then.

We get up and follow her out. I hope she doesn't faint when she sees him. We get to reception and the receptionist stands up and puts a smile on her face.

"Mrs Mkhize!"

"Bianca, please cancel my meetings for the day."

"Maam?"

"Meeting. Cancel them."

"But ma'am, you have important meetings the whole day."

"Tell them I'm not feeling well. I'll see you later." We walk out. We get to the parking lot and instead of going to her own car she follows us to ours.

"You can follow us if you like." I tell her.

"I'd rather ride with you, if that's okay."

"Okay." We get into the car and drive back to the hospital. When we get to the hospital we head straight to his ward. We walk in before her and find him asleep. She gets in and takes slow steps towards the bed. I guess our footsteps are too loud cause Mzwandile stirs and then wakes up. He pulls the mask off of his face. Kwanda takes one gasp and boom, she's out. If Makhosi wasn't next to her,

she'd be on the floor right now. I'm happy my brother is alive but this film that's playing out in front of me right now, I'm not so sure about.

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I still think this whole setup is crazy, but seems no one wants to listen to me. It's like everyone is somehow ignoring that Mzwandile slept with a married woman. And to make matters worse, she is pregnant, with his child. Or so she says. Call me an overprotective sister but at this moment I would do anything to get her away from him, he almost died because of their sneaking around.

Maybe I'm also slowly turning into Zama but I really cant help worrying about Mzwandile. He is not fully healed yet but he is already being driven to Limpopo to escape this man. And his little girlfriend is by his side. Any other time I'd be happy for him, I really, I mean he is going to be a father and I'm going to be an Aunty. But the circumstances are not very good. I'm scared for him, and for us. If the man is as

dangerous as these google searches say then
sisenjeni (we are in trouble.)

"You do know reading all that isn't helping?" Makhosi says coming out of the shower naked. I take one glimpse at him and go back to my research. The police know he is alive and from these gossip pages, he has connections at the police stations too. So it's highly likely that by now he knows that Mzwandile is alive and his whereabouts.

"Do you know how dangerous this man is?" He sits on the bed and looks at the laptop.

"Babe, these are just allegations, the man was never convicted or arrested for any of those crimes."

"Where there is smoke there is fire." He shakes his head and gets off the bed.

"I need you to go take a shower, we still have to drive to Stellenbosch. We are getting married tomorrow."

"I know and my brother is going to miss my wedding. It was better when I thought he was dead, atleast then I could comfort myself by saying his spirit is with us. But now he will be in another province when

I say my vows. It's not fair." I close the laptop and cross my arms on my chest. Yes, apparently I'm a spoilt brat too. I hear Makhosi sigh before he turns around. He sits on the bed and brings me in for a hug. I feel my eyes getting watery.

"He will be there. We can always have him on Skype or zoom." He says. I pull out of the hug and get off the bed.

"Its not the same Khuzwayo. Last week I never thought I'd see him again, he was dead, that's why he couldnt be at my traditional wedding, now he is alive but he still cant be at my white wedding. Where is the fairness in that?"

"He is just trying to protect his child. You would do the same thing too." Maybe.

"I'll go take a shower." I wipe my tears with the back of my hand before going to the bathroom. I take off the gown and get under the running water.

Ten minutes later I'm still standing there with the water cascading over me. Last week when I had my traditional wedding, taking pictures with just my

three siblings was emotional because I knew one was missing. A few days ago I had a bit of hope that this time we could all take a picture together. But that's not going to happen. Maybe I am vain and self centered right now but a week ago I buried my brother, because of someone's husband and now he is going on the run with that same wife. I'm scared. Not just for him but for us too. I keep wondering what's going to happen when this man goes on a rampage looking for his wife.

The water stops running. I look back and the shower door is open and Makhosi is standing there with a towel in hand. He holds out the towel. I take a deep breath and step out of the shower. He wraps the towel around me.

"Look, I know this is hard, but right now, its safer for Mzwandile to not be around here. I promise you when all this dies down he will come home, who knows, maybe by the time he comes back Hlelo and MJ will have a little cousin to play with." That's of he ever comes back.

He helps me back to the bedroom. Our bags are

packed and there's an entire outfit on the bed. How long was I in the bathroom? I take my toiletry bag and start lotioning.

"Are we getting food now or we will get take away?"

"Take aways please." He finishes packing while I look at the outfit he picked. It's a short black dress, a denim jacket and some Van's sneakers. This dress looked good before I had kids and my slender frame was still there. Now I've gained a few kgs, I dont even know why I packed it to begin with.

I put it on and it's a little tight. Not too much, just enough to make me uncomfortable. I look at the luggage thats already waiting by the door. I take one step to it. I need to change this dress.

"Where are you going?" He asks looking up from his phone.

"This dress is too short." He looks at me from head to toe. His eyes get slower when they get to my thighs. That's why he picked this dress, so he can oggle me all the way to Stellenbosch.

"The dress is fine. Hurry up, we have to go."

"Makhosi, this dress is going to show everything. If I bend down my entire backside will be on display."

"No it wont. Turn around, bend over and let me see."

Am I allowed to call my husband a pervert?

"I'm not turning around Makhosi."

"Then the dress stays." All the bags are packed and rummaging through the luggage will make us late. We have to be in Stellenbosch before lunchtime so we can welcome our guests. I guess the dress stays.

I finish getting dressed and we leave. We get down to reception and check out. A porter helps me carry the luggage to the car while Makhosi checks out. I stand by the car watching the videos MamKhuzwayo sent me of the kids. I cant believe I havent seen or held them in my arms in over a week. I cant wait to see them again.

A police van pulls up next to me. Detective Mxenge and Seargent Ndungane step out. Ndungane comes around from the drivers side.

"Mrs Khuzwayo, I'm glad we caught you." Mxenge says sizing me up.

"Detective. I take it you've found the identity of the person we buried?"

"We are still busy with that? Are you going somewhere?" Ndungane asks.

"Yeah we are going to the hospital to check on Mzwandile before we head to Stellenbosch. Is there a problem?" Makhosi asks. I thought he was still inside. He stands next to me. Ndungane and Mxenge look at him.

"Mzwandile is not at the hospital." Okay now I'm confused. I know he is not at the hospital, Makhosi knows it too.

"Of course he is there. It's not like he can go anywhere with his injuries." The two officers look at each other.

"Well he is not there. According to hospital records he checked himself out." Okay I guess we are acting and pretending like we dont know where he is. "We need his statement and to know what happened that day." Ndungane adds.

"Well if he is not at the hospital then we dont know

where he might be. We will call the family and find out. Maybe he was moved to a hospital in KZN so he can be close to family." Makhosi tells them. Now I'm standing here like a statue listening to this conversation like I'm not even here.

"You did hear me say he checked himself out right?" Ndungane asks.

"Either way we don't know where he might be. Last night he was at the hospital when we left."

"Well he is gone. Let us know when you find out where he is." Mxenge says.

"We definitely will do that officer." They get in the car and drive off. Makhosi opens the car door for me and I get in. He gets in on the other side and we drive out of the hotel.

"When the cops ask, we dont know where he is. Are we clear?" Makhosi tells me.

"Yeah. But what if these cops are good cops and they could help him?" Maybe I have too much faith in the police but there are some good ones left. Right?

"Unfortunately, we don't know that. And its better this way." The things we do for love.

The drive to Stellenbosch isn't long. We pull up to the Amara Wine Estate and Hotel. A lady welcomes us at reception.

"Hi. We are here for the Majola-Khuzwayo party." I say.

"Of course. Let me get you someone to help you." She picks up the phone and calls someone. A couple of minutes later a beautiful woman comes to us with a huge grin on her face and a clipboard in hand.

"Hello, my name is Akhona, I am one of the resident wedding planners around here. I take it you're here for the Majola-Khuzwayo wedding?"

"Yes." I answer.

"Perfect. I am the wedding coordinator. We already have a few guests enjoying some cocktails by the lawn. Can I have your names please." She asks looking through her clipboard.

"Tivikele Majola and Makhosi Khuzwayo." Her face

shoots up and I swear her grin just made contact with her ears.

"My bride and groom. Congratulations. Wait here." Okay, not only is she beautiful, she us hyper too. She comes back a few seconds later with two crowns, a bottle of champagne and two glasses. One crown is written bride and the other has groom on it. She hands us the crowns and like obedient children we put them on.

"Perfect. Now for some champagne." She hands us the glasses then pops the bottle. She pours for us. "Unfortunately for me I can't drink on the job. But cheers to you. Let me take you out to the lawn to your guests, someone will take your bags up to your rooms." She leads us out to the lawn and my bridesmaids and his groomsmen are here already. Noise erupts as soon as they see us. His friends are laughing at the crown on his head.

Being with my friends helps me get my mind off of Mzwandile and his shenanigans. More and more guests keep coming, well mostly relatives. I wonder how many people mum and MamKhuzwayo invited

because I know my guest list had less than fifty people. The Khuzwayo clan shows up and of course the first people I see are my babies. Hlelo comes running to me when she sees me. Why do kids grow like weeds when they are not in our presence. I pick her up and spin her around. Her giggles make me so happy.

I guess seeing my kids is all I needed to lay off Mzwandile a bit. Sure he slept with a married woman but I would also take a grenade for my children. After lunch is served I take the kids to our room for a nap. As soon as they are out I get my phone and try to dial Kwanda's number but then I remember she ditched her phone when they left. I doubt Mzwandile will do a sim swap anytime soon so there is no way of getting hold of them. I call his number anyway, as expected it sends me straight to voicemail. I wait for the beep.

"Hey, it's me, your favourite sister. I wish you were here. I hope you're....." I remember the cops are looking for him, and for all we know they might have tapped his phone and they might hear this voicemail.

I really hope this girl is worth it. "I hope you're okay. The cops told us you checked yourself out of the hospital. A stupid move but I'm sure you had your reasons. I miss you Zway zway, take care of yourself and come home soon. I love you." I cant say everything I need to say to him but the most important message, I'm sure its loud and clear and if he does hear this message then he will know he is missed.

I decide to take a nap with the kids before the rehearsal dinner later. By the time I wake up my wedding dress is hanging from a hook up on the ceiling. It looks better than the last time I saw it. Hlelo's tiny princess dress is hanging on the closet handle. This is really happening. I am getting married.

The kids are no longer on their crib. I guess someone took them. I freshen up the head downstairs. It's almost dark outside. But the sunset is beautiful. I get to the lawn and find a mini wedding set up. I find mum and Akhona discussing something.

"Ladies." They turn.

"The bride is here. We can start rehearsing." Akhona says. I'll go get the others.

"Hey, how was your nap?"

"Good. Where are the kids?"

"Phila and Gcinile took them. They are probably man hunting around the estate." I chuckle and take a seat on the chair. Mum sits down next to me.

"You should consider being a wedding planner as a side hustle. You're good at it. You and MamKhuzwayo can make a mean team." She laughs.

"No thank you. This shit is stressful and I'll have to do it again when Gcinile gets married."

"Just out of curiosity, how much money went into this wedding, you've never even asked me to send you money for anything."

"That's why there is something called lobola, this is where the money went."

"How much was it. I'm pretty sure it wasn't enough for all this."

"Even if it wasn't, I've been saving for your wedding

since you were five. You're my first daughter, I had to make sure your wedding is spectacular."

"What if I decided not to get married?"

"Well, I was going to give it to you when you turned thirty five. I gave Bahole his when he turned thirty five since it's clear he is not planning on getting married." I'm not sure if the change in her voice is sadness or what.

"Have you heard from Mzwandile?" She clicks her tongue.

"That one will be the death of me. Even after rising from the dead he comes back with more problems. Atleast he is alive though."

"Yeah. I still cant believe he was a side dish."

"Imagine that. That boy needs Jesus."

The rest of the squad joins us. Pinky and Mabutho are all lovey dove. I guess they have kissed and made up. I hope their relationship lasts for a very long time, they are good for each other.

"So who will be teaching us the step?" Sphetho asks.

"Dont bother. These old people's bones are too stiff."
My lovely sister says making everyone grumble and
laugh. My phone beeps. It's a message from an
unknown number.

'I miss you too and I love you. Take care. I'll see you
soon.'

He's okay. I guess that's the only thing I can ask for.

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One thing I've learnt the past couple of years, there is no manual to this life thing. There is no instructions on how to navigate it and how to get it right. Every step we take is trial and error. We can learn from other people's experiences and mistakes, but ultimately, our life is ours to live.

This day is incomplete without Mzwandile, but I'd rather he be alive and happy somewhere in the world than for him to be dead. I know one day, hopefully, he will come back home and he wont feel the need to be on the run. I guess he loves Kwanda, that's why he wants to protect her. That I can commend him for.

The sun is shining, the birds are singing, it's a

beautiful day to get married. A bride deserves her beauty sleep, not according to my mother though. She's just walked into my room with my bridesmaids behind her and Akhona. They are wearing shorts with white tshirts written bride squad on them. They look so pretty. Mum is wearing a skinny Jean with a white tshirt written mother of the bride.

"Wake up Makoti." Mum says and pulls the curtains apart bringing all the light in.

"I'm up already. What's going on? What's with the uniform." Mum stares at me with her hands on her waist.

"Your uniform is waiting for you. Get up." She says. Simz throws a pair of shorts with a black tshirt written bride on it with Gold. I really have to wear this? What happened to silk gowns? I take my pjs off right in front of them. Unfortunately for me my period started in the early hours of the morning so I got up early and took a shower. So no need to take one now. I'm just happy I didnt stain the white sheets. "Akhona,

tell us what needs to be done right now." She tells us.

"Okay, now we are going down to the restaurant for breakfast, the groom and his groomsmen will meet us there. After breakfast the girls are going to have massages and some manicures and pedicures. The boys will go to the Golf club for some golfing, and then we will meet up again for brunch. After brunch we will come back to the rooms for hair and makeup. The hairdressers and make up artists are already on their way, they will be setting up while we do these activities." Yeah it's going to be a busy day.

I get dressed then head to the bathroom to wash my face and brush my teeth. When I'm done I tie my braids up in a ponytail. I come out of the bathroom and there is already champagne glasses floating around. It's not even 7 o'clock yet. Oh well, it's a wedding day so anything flies. The kids are ready, I guess the girls took care of that. Musa hands me a glass of champagne.

"Before we toast, can we pray?" Gcinile says drawing all the attention to her. I expected that from mum not her. People can really surprise you.

"Okay." We all bow our heads in prayer. I dont know when the photographer got here but she is snapping away from every angle.

"Heavenly father, God of miracles, as this dag begins, we would like to dedicate it to you Lord. May your will be done today heavenly father and may you bless this marriage with atleast ten kids." My head shoots up and I look at her. Her eyes are closed and she looks like she is deep within the spirit. She cant be putting that kind of energy out to the universe.

Who the fuck wants ten kids? "Lord, let no weapons formed against this marriage prosper, in fact, if Makhosi cheats, let his balls grow until they reach his feet so everyone knows he is a cheater, and if Tivikele cheats." I see more eyes open and we are all staring at her. This girl is going to drive me nuts.

"And if Tivikele cheats, Lord, make sure her boobs grow all the way to her feet." Well atleast she didnt say anything hectic, I can always get a boob job.

"And Lord..." mum interjects. "May all the single girls here find husbands today, or at least potential husbands ke. Something Lord, even if they are gay let them find partners today. They waste too much money on dildos." We burst out laughing as she says Amen.

"Really ma?" Musa says.

"What? I want what's best for you. Let's go have breakfast." She says. We lift our glasses up and Thobi makes a toast.

"To forever, and to endless years of love and happiness."

"Here here." We click our glasses and follow mum as she leads the way out with Akhona right beside her.

"Wena sathane, what kind of prayer was that?" I ask Gcinile.

"What? I want you to be happy. That's all."

"Balls and boobs growing to the floor? What kind of prayer is that?"

"The kind that will keep both of you in check." Yeah life was better when I was the only girl. Is it possible to get a refund or its too late for her?

We get to the restaurant and the guys are here already. Most family is here, and from the looks of it, the whole restaurant has been closed off for this breakfast. I wonder where the other guests are. We join Makhosi and the guys at the huge bridal party table. They've also been bullied into wearing golf tshirts with team groom on it. I'm glad the parents planned this, if it were me, we would have probably eloped and went to Mauritius and get married there.

"I love the shorts." Makhosi says while pulling the chair out for me.

"So today is the day?" I tell him as he sits down. He smiles and holds my hand and kisses it.

"Yep. Today is, it's supposed to be the beginning of the rest of our lives but this is just a formality, our lives began the day I laid eyes on you." He says

making me blush. I should be proud of myself, now I can go back to the beginning and not feel angry, somehow I've learnt to block the whole bet thing out of my head. And in my story, the one I'll tell my grandkids some day, that part will not be there. Maybe I'm burying my head in the sand when it comes to that but I would much rather not remember that time.

MamKhuzwayo and Bab'Khuzwayo come in and they are both wearing tshirts too. I wonder how many tshirts they had made for this. I have never seen MamKhuzwayo wearing pants, let alone Jean's, but today her curves are fully loaded in that Jean.

"I've never seen your mum wearing Jean's." I tell Makhosi. He is also looking at her with his mouth wide open.

"I've never seen her either." He says, his eyes still on her. She looks good though.

"I think baba has never seem her either, he can't keep his eyes off of her ass." They greet and walk to

the elders table.

"Please dont say that. I'd rather not think about my father ogling my mother." I laugh. Does he know thats his wife? Who is he supposed go ogle if not his wife.

"That's his wife. She might be your mother but she was his wife before she became your mother. And that ass is tight." He turns to look at me and I laugh. If he is not careful he will die of a heart attack.

"Please stop talking about her like that. That's my mother." He says looking like he is ready to puke.

"Do you think MJ will be saying the same thing about me." His face relaxes and he looks at my thighs.

"Probably. But that's far far off. Right now I can look at my wife in shorts and get a hard on without feeling guilty about the kids." He runs his hand down my thighs before burying his fingers in between my thighs. Good thing no one can see under the table. "I cant for our wedding night." He whispers in my ear.

"I'm on my period." I whisper back.

"A red light has never stopped anything but traffic."

He says then turns to Ndalo leaving me dumbfounded. The fuck does he mean?

Breakfast is served and boy is it amazing. I look around the room and realize this is my family, both extended and now new family, crazy as it is, with all my flaws and choices I've made, somehow I hit the jackpot when it comes to family and in laws. Of course there are those who've been Zama and her hatred for me but I can safely say a majority of the Khuzwayo's are sweet and kind. The most important people who matter though are Mr and Mrs Khuzwayo senior, I know they like me, and they are amazing grandparents so I know things wont be as drastic as some people get to experience. That, I'm thankful for.

After breakfast we go our separate ways. While some bridesmaids are getting massages, some are

busy with pedicures and manicures.

"Have you heard from Mzwandile?" Gcinile asks me while we get our back massages.

"Not today. He did send me a text last night saying he misses us and he will see us soon." She sighs and rests her head on top of her hands.

"I can't believe he is gone. I know he will be back but I miss him."

"I know. I miss him too, but he is doing what he needs to do for his child."

"I understand that, I dont understand why it had to be with a married woman. Somehow that part just doesnt make sense to me."

"The heart wants what it wants sis wam. With everything that happened between Makhosi and I in the beginning it would be easy for someone to say we shouldn't even be here right now, but as they say, inhliziyo ayiphakelwa (we dont choose who we love.)"

"I guess. But I did tell you he was tapping that ass."

We burst out laughing.

"I know. And when he told me to find her your words came back to me."

"As long as he is happy."

"Yep."

When we are done with the massage we swap seats with the others and we get our nails done. I'm not a fan of long nails so I choose short white nails with some glitter on the ring finger. They are perfect, for me anyways. When all that is done and the time gets close for me to say I do I feel the nerves also kicking in. I am not sure why though, I guess that's normal for brides right?

We head to the restaurant for brunch but its empty. No one is here.

"Where is everyone?" Simz asks.

"Beats me. What's going on?" I ask no one in particular.

"Ladies. You are here." Akhona says coming from behind us.

"Yes. Where is the brunch?"

"You're early. The others are at a wine tasting. But since you are here, you can sit, I'll bring you the mimosas." We take our seats and wait for the others.

The door opens and someone walks in. When we turn I find Sihle Mkhize strutting in with a couple of guys behind him. He has a smile on his face, a creepy weird smile. If I didn't know what I know about him I'd consider him handsome, but they say beauty comes from within right, and this one, I don't think he has any beauty.

He walks up to our table and looks straight at me. His smile is still there and it's still creepy as heck.

"Mrs Khuzwayo, it's nice to see you again." He says with his hand extended for a handshake. I reluctantly take it and shake his hand. When I feel him tighten

his hand around mine I quickly pull it away. Surprising even him.

"I don't think we've met." I tell him. He chuckles.

"Actually we met at my wife's office. She used to work with your brother Mzwandile, I believe." I pretend to remember him.

"Oh yeah, now I remember. How are you?"

"I'm holding on." He says. His eyes are still glued on me.

"How is the wife, I hope you're still taking care of that precious cargo." He laughs.

"Of course. That's very important." The door opens again and Bahole, Mabutho and some of our cousins walk in with the groomsmen behind them. I see Bahole's face get hard when he sees Sihle. He walks over to us and greets.

"Khabazela, this is a private function." He tells him. Sihle just laughs.

"I know that Majola, I just thought I'd come give my

congratulations to your sister."

"Thank you. I'll walk you out." Bahole tells him. Sihle turns to me.

"It was nice seeing you again MamKhuzwayo." He says and walks out with Bahole.

I let out the breath I was holding in. I'm pretty sure he is not here for anything other than a fishing expedition. And why does it look like him and Bahole know each other?

NARRATED

Weddings, who doesn't love them. Mrs Majola has been planning this wedding with Mrs Khuzwayo, for her, this day is special, it's her daughters send off. All she wants is to make everything goes according to plan. Tivikele's non interest in the planning worked in her mother's favour, she got free reign to plan this wedding how she sees fit. And she couldnt be any

happier.

"It's perfect isn't it?" Mrs Khuzwayo says standing next to her counterpart, they are looking at the set up for the matrimonial ceremony in the gardening.

"We did well. It's amazing." She sighs. "I cant believe she's getting married. It's like I'm losing her."

"You're not."

"I know. I guess I can rest easy knowing I'm handing her over to your family. Atleast I know she'll be in warm hands."

"Of course. She's a good girl. I've always wanted Makhosi to marry a good girl, smart and beautiful, and he did. After that whooping you gave him I thought he'd run and never look back." They laugh.

"Well he is clearly fearless. He knew what he wanted, and went after it. I can respect that."

"I'm just happy he got back in the straight and narrow. Now I can die happy."

"Dont even think about dying. We still have grandkids

to spoil."

"Speaking of grandkids, let me go get those two ready." Mrs Khuzwayo leaves, leaving MamMajola to monitor the last minute things and making sure all is in order.

Meanwhile in the parking lot, Sihle is sitting on the hood of his car. Bahole comes to him after watching him from a distance.

"You're still here?" Bahole asks him. Sihle crosses his hands on his chest and looks at him.

"You know why I'm here Majola and I'm not leaving without what I came here for."

"And what exactly did you come for Sihle?"

"I'm here for my wife. I believe your brother knows where she might be." He tells him.

"Mabutho doesn't know your wife." Bahole says and Sihle chuckles.

"Your other brother, Mzwandile."

"Mzwandile is in the States receiving treatment after the accident he had."

"I thought he died." Sihle says.

"Wouldnt you like that. I know you tried to kill him. And if it were up to me I'd put a bullet in your head for that, you and I had a deal, you stay away from my territory and I stay away from yours. My brother falls under my territory. I'll turn the other cheek and pretend I dont know what you did because I understand my brother wronged you. But you got your payback, my brother almost died and you got your wife back. Now leave him the fuck alone."

"I dont want your brother, I want my wife."

"And like I said, my brother is in a neurology hospital in the States receiving treatment. Check flight logs from the past couple of days if you dont believe me. Your wife, well, it took her a long time to leave you but I'm glad she did. She deserves better." Sihle laughs.

"And better is your brother?"

"You're too stubborn for your own good. Leave my brother alone Sihle. He needs this time to heal from that little accident you caused. Leave him the fuck alone. I'll help you look for your wife. My brother is off limits."

"Enjoy the wedding." Sihle says and gets into his car. His guys get in and they drive off.

"Do you believe him?" One of Sihle's guys asks.

"Check the flight logs. If his name is not on any flight to the States, he will wish his brother had died in that accident." He says.

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The wedding party is ready for the ceremony, Tivikele looks like a dream in her dress, her bridesmaids look gorgeous in their rose gold dresses. Tivikele looks at herself in the mirror one last time.

"Okay, I'm ready." She says and walks out the door. She finds her father waiting for her. He gets teary when he sees her.

"You look amazing." She smiles and gives him a hug.

"Thank you."

"Are you ready?" She nods her head then hooks her arm to her dad's then they walk out.

In the garden, Makhosi is nervously waiting for his bride. Everyone has assembled to the garden for the ceremony. Security has been tightened around the estate, Bahole doesn't trust Sihle to stay away, so he has to remain cautious.

With a little help from my friends by the Beatles blasts through the speakers as the band plays the instrumentals. The bridesmaids walk down the aisle all smiles till they all get to the end of the aisle. One of Tivikele's nieces comes down the aisle with a basket of rose petals. She throws them around till

she gets to the end of the aisle. Musa's little brother comes down the aisle with pulling a little wagon with Hlelo and MJ in it. The wagon has a silk rose gold ribbon around it and a little chalkboard written 'you can still run' on it, making people laugh.

Finally the bride walks down the aisle to the sounds of Etta James' At last. Makhosi wipes a couple of tears as he watches his bride walk down the aisle. This is it, this is the woman he gets to spend the rest of his life with, this is who he is about to pledge his never ending love to. He is happy, no one can deny that.

The bride reaches the end of the aisle and her father hands her over to her husband. The two look at each other with smiles plastered on their faces before they turn to the pastor. After saying a few verses he asks the couple to look at each other again.

From the corner of her eye, Tivikele sees Andile

sitting behind Kevin. A little bout of fear creeps up on her. She knows she didn't invite either one of them, so how did they get here.

"If anyone here knows any reason why these two should not be wed, please speak now, or forever hold your peace." The pastor says. He looks around for a second and when he sees no one is standing up he sighs and focuses on the couple. "Okay then, Tivikele, do you know of any reason why this wedding should not continue?" He asks her. She thinks of the two men who, once upon a time were her, well, friends with benefits. They had fun together, they did a whole lot of things together, but this man before her, this man holding her hands, now this is her future, this is the man she will wake up to for the rest of her life. And she couldnt have it any other way. This is her forever, this is her giving up her player card, fully.

"No." She says and everyone ululates. This is it. This is her forever.

The End.