MAKAZIWE LET HER BE KNOWN

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Makaziwe Let Her Be Known

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The long hand hits 12, it's now 17pm, I let out a short breath, as we are close to 18pm and that's the time I leave and go home.

"You seem far away can you hear me?" I smile and shift my eyes to her, I have been working here for a year now and I already know her, her name is Mamani; she stays 5minutes away from the store. She always comes here in her Toyota uniform after work specifically for 2 muffins from the bakery and milk. She told me it's her love for coffee that makes her run out of milk every after 4 days.

"How are you today?" she asks and I smile, I don't know how to answer this question nor does my response ever differ, I wonder why she always keeps asking me that question knowing the answer to it, maybe she hopes one day ill burst out and say I'm ecstatic because I won the Powerball? Or any form of betting at that. She clears her throat, my short concentration span.

"I'm okay, I can't complain" she smiles, and I chuckle and push the machine towards her.

"I come bearing good news before I pay" I frown.

"There is a cleaning job at the company; I got all the information for you."

I smile and take the paper from her, and I nod and put it on the small shelf underneath.

"Thank you!"

She nods and walks away with her plastic. I turn to another customer, and she shoves her things in my face, I don't think it would hurt if I gave her a tiny piece of my mind, would it? Palesa quickly makes her way to my till, and she grabs a plastic and looks at me. Day by day she has been helping me control my mouth, I need this job, I can't lose it, and we just found out that my mother had cancer before we left our life behind, so I need money for her treatment.

I keep quiet and scan the customer's things and she walks off with her plastic.

"You know you on your last warning, you can't afford any more complaints and it hasn't even been 2 years since you have been here Makazi."

"I know, but I started looking for a second job in case" I sway the small piece of paper with a smile, and she laughs, she's like an older sister I never asked for and never knew I needed.

"I'm serious, it's a cleaning job."

"I wouldn't be surprised if next you became a plumber! What are you trying to do? Gain experience from every low paying job Kazi?"

"It wouldn't hurt."

“Get to working please” I laugh, and we attend to more customers until the clock hits 18pm, great, it's now time to go home, I had been wondering how my mother is doing, she only looks better when I am around, if I get that one day off or half day at work.

“How’s your mother? My mother said I must ask, she will come see her sometime this week” I turn to her and she smiles weakly, that’s the reason I’m looking for a second job, we can't survive off of one job that I’m left with one warning, we just moved to her township no longer than a year ago so our place still needs more things.

“Nothing is different, but we will get there, she will be fine” I smile and turn to her, and we get off the taxi and arrive at the taxi rank, there’s always a truck every after a few days but today I count about 3 the place gets crowded, and it gets too busy when they are around.

We walk past queues and I hold on tight to my handbag, not much is in there, and actually… nothing is in there. Palesa and I go to town very often, to buy things that we need in the house, and she holds her bag with little to no care, when I ask, she says no one would dare test her karate skills nor waste their time taking it because it's clear there’s nothing in it. I laugh at many things she says.

"Can you please not zone out while we in the middle of people during rush hour, you will start unnecessary fights" I smile, and blink and I turn to her.

"You know what I'm thinking of? Fish and Chips I'm not cooking today" She laughs and nods, I have little cash that I save for Friday's when it's time to cook, I've made it a thing now that we do not cook on Friday's but then again, I would do anything to not cook. I still have a bit of mistrust when it comes to using our small gas, I could burn the house with it I have means of saving for a microwave stove I once saw in town. We make our way to MaVee's stall, I love it, she sells everything down to puffy chips that turn your finger's red after eating them.

I greet her and ask for fish and chips for R20, she knows it's my usual order now. She smiles and nods and she take out a takeaway and I pick which fish looks more appealing to me; at least I have that option.

"Please make it two mama Vee" She takes out R20 and hands it to her and I chuckle, her mother hates fish so I didn't think she would go ahead and buy it. I look at the queue for our taxi, how long it is and it looks like the line is not moving, I grunt when I see that it's getting darker by the minute.

"Here" I turn to her and we hear a loud laughter from afar, I turn with a frown and I see a group of men eating, we know this place sells the best food, we usually eat it at Palesa's house.

"They are playing the same things here now" I turn to her with a frown and she tries to laugh. I got this TV, it's a typical Telefunken TV that needs to be banged on the side whenever it has no signal; at least we have some sort of entertainment.

"I heard someone knocking earlier, it must have been MaGumede" I turn to her and frown.

"Do you know what she would want?" she shakes her head and I nod. I turn on Skeem Sam and I dish up for her, that's our show, or Generations and Scandal. The other shows on 161 I hear from Palesa; they seem interesting but I think I like them better when she tells me about them.

"Change your uniform phela Makazi."

"Whoever said I wasn't was lying" She gives me her sharp look and I smile, it never goes anywhere, I always get a bit surprised that she still has it, it always makes me feel better, it comforts me into thinking she will get better. I bath after having a marathon with our shows and I rinse the dish. I wear my pyjamas and dish up for myself and I wear my gown and head out to MaGumede's house. She's our landlord, sometimes I wish to call her more than that because our relationship goes beyond being landlord and tenants in a year.

I knock on the door and looked around, it's getting colder now at night, but it's all because winter is approaching, I hate those times, I make a mental note to look for a heater, Palesa and I need to go to town again.

"Makazi how are you?" I smile and she engulfs me with a hug.

"I'm good MaGumz, you?" she laughs, she says even her son has never thought of calling her that and here I am.

"I'm good come in, I just came back from work" I nod and she steps aside and I walk in. She works as a helper somewhere in the suburb areas and she has been doing that ever since. Her son is still studying to be an engineer. I have met him a couple of times, he is as kind as his mother.

"How was work mme?" She sighs and I laugh, she will always have a story for everything and I love hearing all about it, she says her bosses are white so everything they do is a culture shock to her. Like the wife washing her hair on the sink in the kitchen or living with dogs inside the house, she never gets used to them; she once shouted "voetsek" to it when it licked her foot, this was in front of her bosses.

"It was tiring, I'm just waiting for Thato to graduate now so I can finally stop working, I know you already want tea?" she smiles and looks at me and I nod, green tea, she knows me too well, she loves that she found someone as interested in tea like her,

We talk more, she said I should leave the church topic but we there now, how their priest dismissed one of the women who went to their church because she talks too much and spreads rumours that ruin his reputation and his church, I shake my head, tent churches.

“Before I forget” She gets up and opens her fridge, it's another plastic I would assume with fruits.

“Please give this to your mother,” I smile, and nod, see why I say our relationship is much more than tenants and landlord, maybe if my mother had sisters like this- but then again, she got married and never looked back home. I pray marriage doesn’t do that to me, to what it has done to most people, forgetting about home, but it won't because my home is my mother and the woman next to me along with Palesa and her mother.

“I have to go MaGumz, thank you for everything I will speak to my mother and tell her about joining the stokvel” she nods and smiles and we hug. I finish the rest of my tea and she laughs; she shouldn’t do that to me I could never leave even a sip of tea left in a mug.

“MaGumede” I show her the plastic and she frowns and sits properly, I sit on the couch next to her, well it only fits me and her, we wouldn’t be able to sit properly if we didn’t lose weight.

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THE MAN IN THE OVERALL PANTS

That old prick! I tried to stay calm and patient while I wait for a taxi to drive by and take me to the taxi rank, I went as far as undoing half my hair to pass time, but there are no taxi's stopping by, he made me work overtime. I cried until I couldn't anymore, I knocked off around pass 7pm but I have been standing on this road for what feels like an hour.

I'm sure my mother must be worried, I told Palesa to leave because she had to go home and plait someone's hair. I start walking and I kick the rocks I'm walking past. I'm angry all over again, this doesn't usually happen but here I am, I'm praying the queue was long enough for there to be a taxi going home, but who am I kidding it's almost 8pm now!

I get a lift from a good Samaritan woman, I jumped in the car with her kids at the back, I'm sure she thought something happened to me but I'm just frustrated, I want to go home I have had a long day.

She leaves me at the taxi rank that's enough mercy from her already; she looked like she was way out of her comfort zone in this area with her kids.

Now, my concern is seeing a few taxis' but none of them are going to my place or even near. I try to see if I can spot Kgotso, his friend or maybe that he will drive by just by luck and I don't. I feel a wave of panic and I cling onto my bag, this is just great, I'm sure I look like a crazy woman. I sigh and start walking and I wait next to where the taxi's going home usually line up, maybe someone will come back and check if there are any more passenger's, who am I honestly kidding.

"Sister" I shake my head and turn to the guy, there's a 100% chance the bag I'm carrying will get stolen from me.

"Hi sorry you were saying."

"Please can you give me R50" I ignore him trying to piece English together and I sigh and look away in defeat already, he's probably asking before he sees if he feels the need to steal it.

"I really don't have, it's the only money I have left to go home" I don't even have extra cash, it's the truth but what do they know about the truth and what not.

"Can I check?" he tries to take my bag and I hold on tight to it.

"She said she doesn't have it" the guy looks behind me and he nods slowly and walks away.

"Thank you, but I would have handled it" I know I wouldn't have but, in case he tries something I have to give him the impression that I can take care of myself.

"I know you would have, are you catching a taxi at this time?" I turn, what's making me turn is the bit of concern he has in his voice, I can sense he is concerned. I look up at him and I'm surprised to see that I have seen those eyes before, and the blue overalls on his waist, this time he's wearing a white t-shirt, how clean, too clean.

"I'm fine thank you," he shakes his head and I look away, he has this straight posture I feel like I'm the one slouching, and the sharp voice, how did I not catch that its him.

"That's not what I asked" I look up at him, he has a frown on his face, ever since I turned to him, he has had the frown on his face.

I sigh and wipe the tears planning to fall out.

"What happened?" I look at him, his frown is frustrating me even more, why is he frowning at me? I fold my arms and I grip my bag.

"I'm trying to get home, it's been a long day, I need a taxi to get home but I can't find one."

"Okay come, I will take you home."

“Don’t worry, I will take a taxi that goes to a friend’s house” he nods, I’m lying, Palesa and I take the same taxi going home but, I still can’t trust this stranger not at this time of day or any time of the day.

“Okay, I will wait till you get a taxi” I look up at him, a bit shocked at his response and he frowns, he had stopped for a minute, I look away and I nod.

“Thanks” I really might need it this time and I think he can sense he’s my only option to get out of here, this time around there isn’t a long queue or thousands of people up and down to guarantee that I might be safe.

“Mcebo!” I get startled and we turn to the man shouting, he makes his way to us dressed similar to him, what are these people?

“We need you to please move your truck” I look at him, he sounded respectful and down to earth.

“I’m coming, you can move it or ask Mzwandile to move it for me” the man nods and gives me a quick smile before taking the truck keys from Mcebo and walking away. I try to keep it in but I can't, I’m failing to.

“You were going to take me home with a truck?”

“Yes” I chuckle and fix my hair, maybe it makes it look like I’m well deserving of a lift from a truck driver, is he serious? Or pulling my leg? Do you even pull a leg with that joke?

“Oh” he frowns and folds his arms, and this frowning I’m tired, now I can't help but think if something is wrong other than my hair. Not that it matters to this man who drives a truck, I can imagine how I look, half of my hair done and the other half not done, I’m a bit embarrassed.

He clears his throat and I blink and look up at him and I turn to the front, I pray Kgotso or one of his friend’s drive past.

“What…” he looks up at me from his phone “What time is it again?”

“9:30pm” I nod, the taxi rank is now empty, I look like the biggest fool, I have been standing here with no plan or way forward, I know I zoned out and he just let me be, I turn to his shirt, the fresh smell is getting stronger by the minute, aren’t they meant to be sweating from driving all day long from ends of the country?”

He clears his throat and I blink.

“Please take me home” I nod, he looks a bit relieved by that, like “finally woman” what if I had tested him and stayed here till anytime passed midnight, I feel like he would have stayed with me.

I’m glad that he’s not ego-ed up about the fact that he was my last option or only option if I’m being honest, instead he leads me to his truck.

I cannot believe this really, I can't, I'm dragging my feet as we walk, it's one of those huge trucks that transport food, and this one looks like it transports fruits and vegetables judging by the agricultural wrapping from outside. I sigh and look around the rank briefly; I'm more relieved it's empty.

He opens the door and I die inside as he helps me climb on the step and I get in. I pray I erase and forget this day in my memories, I'm about to ride with a truck driver who probably has 5 kids from different mothers in different provinces. I know stories about these people and how some of them cheat on their wives and come back with diseases.

"Are you sure I can take you home?" I blink and shake my head and I turn to him, do I have a choice, I give him a sarcastic look, at least I think that's what it is, he's the only option of leaving this place, besides, the other options didn't look too safe for me, that is asking a random driver to take me home.

"You see this boy is trying to get on my nerves, he knows not to touch the starring wheel without washing his hands after eating!" I blink and turn to him, he's angry, I'm confused, what should I now say or do?

"Excuse me" I move my leg and he opens the cabin holder and takes out wipes, oh but the smell of the truck, the seats, is the leather new?"

I turn to check if it is and I look around, I can't even spot dust, I know I can't because I do clean, it's one of my specialities other than zoning out.

“It's, Makaziwe” he turns to me from wiping his starring wheel, he looked so focused at removing whatever germs or stain there was. He nods and puts the wipes back and puts on hand sanitiser before starting the truck, he still looks at bit annoyed, his eyebrows are still furrowed.

“Are you still mad about the dirt or stain on the starring wheel?” I chuckle, I actually find it a bit ridiculous, an old man, father of 5 like him?

“I’m only angry because he did it on purpose.”

“Who? Mzwandile?” he turns to me, and nods and I shift uncomfortably.

“Please, keep your eyes on the road if you don’t mind, trucks give me a bit of stress.”

“Sorry,” I nod, and he carries on driving and I turn to him and smile.

“I’m actually crazy for detecting all the satisfying smells in here” he turns to me and frowns.

“Not everyone understands.”

"Well, I do" He turns his eyes to the road, and I sigh and get comfortable on this seat. I turn to the window, and I look at all the cars driving by, they appear smaller from this huge vehicle, I wonder how he does this every day.

I don't even want to know what people from my township will say hearing such a vehicle, they will probably think they coming to deliver us fruits and vegetables we ordered, or the noise will give it away as the garbage truck but it's not even Tuesday and the time is very late. We drive around till we reach my house, more so I'm ready to get out, I'm sure people have heard enough of the truck engine to wake up.

I look in the yard and see that it's dark inside MaGumede's house, she must be asleep, maybe my mother probably slept with her because I arrived late. MaGumede is not the type to lose a battle, not with God by her side and her skills of being able to convince someone into doing anything. I turn to him, and he leans back and looks at me and I squeeze my bag.

"Thank you so much, God bless you" I don't even know if he believes in God or not but my mother does and it's enough for the whole nation. I open the door and jump out and I close it and smelled my jersey, it's just how I guessed, I smell like him now and I didn't even touch him.

I make my way inside the room, and I get in and locked the door and I sigh, I was fully convinced in high school with the friends I had back then that by this age at least I would have a chef degree or studying towards something, anything but working to survive, like I do now.

My mother is not in here, so she slept with MaGumede inside the house. I notice there's food for me covered on the counter but I'm not hungry. I get undressed and I chuckle thinking about it, where my old friends are in life but I know definitely not in a back room, they're probably married by now or something proper. I undo the rest of my hair and I get in under my blanket, let me try not to think about that old prick before I get angry any further, my safety was compromised tonight! If it wasn't for that good Samaritan woman or Mcebo I don't know what I would have done.

I woke up a bit later today, thankfully I'm not working, after yesterday I don't think I ever want to work again, do you even confront someone who gave you a job you begged for? But anyways I figured I will buy groceries tomorrow after work so today I can get to do the washing. I finish rinsing my clothes and I hang them on the line.

Before I walk into the room I hear a roaring engine and I frown, it's not Tuesday, it's not garbage day, that could only mean it's one person.

The truck finds a spot to park, it takes him 5minutes to manoeuvre and park that huge vehicle on our small street properly, why is Mcebo out to embarrass me like this! Does he want me to be the talk of the township!

"Is that the garbage truck? Why is it early this week did you prepare the garbage Makazi?" My mother asks inside our room and I take the dish and get inside.

"Don't worry about it, the neighbours ordered furniture. Let me go get my hair washed and pass by pep to get a phone so I can be back quickly" she looks up from her Bible and nods and I change into a dress and tied my hair and I walk out and lock the door. Mcebo gets out as soon as he sees me approach and I roll my eyes, I probably have turned red from the looks the kids who play on the streets are giving us - this is ridiculous! I open the gate and close it and I ignore him and start walking.

"Makaziwe" I up my pace and greet the neighbours sitting outside the house and he catches up to me, I love his smell of fresh clothes I just want to be engulfed by the smell but I'm angry at his huge vehicle I can't lose sight of that.

"Makaziwe," I stop and look at him.

"What are you doing here Mcebo our township roads are too small for this vehicle you want everyone to look at us!" He looks around before smiling and I fold my arms.

"I'm sorry, I'm driving to Durban I just wanted to see you again before I leave" I sigh and look away, so what am I supposed to do? Tell him to have a safe journey?

"Okay, have a safe journey, I need to go do my hair" I walk off and he follows me, he's now walking next to me, backwards, I didn't say I want his company, but I smile a bit and he also smiles.

"Shouldn't you be going to Durban already?"

"I will go; can I take you where you going?" Absolutely not! He has caused enough noise pollution.

"No, I'm almost there; it's just here by Palesa's place."

"Palesa?" I smile and tell him all about Palesa and her mother, my mother and MaGumede, maybe I needed the company to the salon because it ended up feeling like a short journey. We get there and I get my hair treated and straightened, the last I checked all of that was R100 and I didn't want anything over the R50 that I have. I only came here to get it washed but I guess the ladies here were smitten by Mcebo who has been outside waiting for me while he's on his phone. I didn't think he would wait for me; I'm worried because he has to be in Durban.

I get up and they compliment me and I smile and touch my hair. I turn to Mcebo and he gets in looking at me and I smile and turn to the mirror.

“How much is it?” He asks and I frown and turn to him in a speed of lightening, I didn’t come here so he can pay for doing my hair. He pays the amount to the lady, it was R100! Where on earth was I going to get the extra R50! This is daylight robbery, but I can’t voice that out I’m not with Palesa who’s probably out braiding someone’s hair. We head out and he touches my hair and I turn to him, oh no he did not!

“Mcebo I just did it!” He smiles and I shake my head while I practice to say thank you to him in my head, I really don't want it to seem like this is why I agreed he comes with me.

“Thank you” I finally say and he pays no attention to it, oh okay now I just feel stupid for thanking him. I won't go to pep anymore; I will get the phone another time before he pays it for me.

“When are you driving down to Durban?” He looks at his watch.

“After eating with you.”

“Eating what? You want to eat something?” He nods and opens the truck door and he looks at me to get in, ugh! Do I even have a choice? I get in and fan myself and I look around, did he have to park directly facing the sun it’s so hot, does it even have aircon? I tie my hair that’s starting to annoy me on my neck and I sigh. I watch him making his way to his side and I smile, he does look somewhat handsome.

He gets in and he starts the engine and he switches on the aircon. I start relaxing and sit back this time around maybe I should start getting used to this I don't know, should I?

"What do you like eating?" I turn to him and shrug, I know exactly what I love eating and that's pizza but I can't tell him that, I only have it once in a blue moon, so I don't have the courage to tell him to get it when I can't even get it myself maybe we could get food at the rank.

"Makaziwe what do you like eating?" Okay, he does have a sharp voice naturally but something tells me he hates repeating himself.

"Anything," I say.

"So they sell anything now?" He looks at me and I shake my head.

"Pizza" I say and bite my lip to his reaction and he just nods plainly, I don't know what reaction I expected if I am being honest.

We drive for the longest time until we arrive outside Debonairs, and it's my favourite pizza place! He goes inside to collect the boxes of pizza for me, he received a call that he has to be on the road so he won't arrive when it's dark and I agreed with the person on the phone but only in my head, he said it's his younger brother, Mlungisi.

He gets in and I smile excitedly at the boxes of pizza, I cannot believe this! I can't wait to eat this with a cup of tea and have it for lunch tomorrow at work.

"Thank you so much" I'm beaming; probably turning red by the second, I cannot hide my excitement of not cooking for two days in a row.

"I have never seen you look this happy before" I chuckle and nod, I'm surprised myself not a lot makes me happy.

"Yes, I am happy, I haven't had pizza in a long time and it's my favourite thing to eat."

"I will make sure you eat it every day for the rest of your life" I smile and shake my head.

"How flattering, we can leave, you have to go to Durban, remember?" He chuckles and nods and he drops me off at home.

I decide to take a nap while I wait for MaGumede to come back from work so we can all go to her place and eat. She has a nice little 2-bedroom house and she lives alone unless her son is around so she doesn't mind her space that fits both of them.

We all eat over Palesa's 161 shows and I remember to pack a dish for her. MaGumede suggests my mother sleeps in the house tonight and I don't mind, maybe she wants them to talk all night like they did yesterday maybe she enjoyed the company.

I have a dress, a black knee length dress, It worked as soon as I put it on, the only thing MaGumz bought for me are sandals, I'm ready with my hair tied at the back. I have googled probably checking all the restaurants in this whole city. I don't know where he's taking me, I think I have been trying to figure that out for the whole time sitting here with my mother and MaGumede. I'm on my second cup of tea, my mother told me to slow it down because I will probably drink tea again where I'm going. As if she knows where I'm going, as if Mcebo hinted to her where we going, or if that place has tea. Lunch to Mcebo was eating in his truck, what is dinner. But I love him and I will love it no matter what he plans.

There's a knock on the door and my mother and MaGumede get up, my mother probably hasn't slept, he wants to meet him both of them. They open the door for him and I sit there, they probably want to get a mini interview from him. I get up when I see that my mother is going towards the direction of asking if he has any sickness, any wives or children. I make my way to the door and he smiles at me, black shirt and black pants he looks handsome but I still love the overall pants more but this scene is needed, once or twice. My mother bids us farewell, why do I sense she now wants to walk us to the car, but she is happy, that I can guarantee.

"You look beautiful" I smile and turn to him, we headed to the gate, he once told me I look beautiful when my hair wasn't combed, so I believe it, it looks like today we are going to a serious place, I never thought I would see him dressed in formal wear, not even when I think of him and I being married, yes I have thought that far, it's the love I have for him that keeps growing each day. He places his hand on my back and I blink.

We start walking to the gate and I stop and laugh when I look at the car.

"Mcebo! I thought you would come here in one of your trucks."

"You prefer I go fetch it quickly so we can go with it?"

"No, this is better, unless we going to eat in a parking lot" he smiles and we walk out, it's a white Ford Ranger, it must be Ocean Baskets or Mugg n Bean that we going to, something up that alley.

He opens the door for me and I get in and he walks to his side and gets in.

"You are one of a kind" he turns to me, takes my hand and kisses it and I look around the car, I haven't been in a car with him it's always a truck but this car is similar to it, so it's not too different. I'm done guessing where we going just as long as there's tea and he knows me and knows I love tea.

I watch him drive away and he leans back on the chair, he looks so focused on the road with my hand is in his,

I wish, for this night that has just started to not end. I hope it stays like this forever even if he works at all parts of this country, I hope he prioritises these kinds of nights even if he's dressed in overall pants and I in whichever uniform.

I could never guess wrong, we at Ocean Basket, seated outside, the weather is warm so it's perfect and there are families here with kids playing around, I don't know if we will have kids one day but it's part of the things we should converse about right?

He clears his throat and I blink and smile at him.

"Your tea will turn cold" I chuckle and sip it and him with his beer, he loves beer, at times I even wonder if he knows there's other liquids.

"I was just wondering if you don't have any kids that will come rocking up one day?" I clear my throat and quickly sip my tea and he frowns, I had to ask, he will forgive me, my mother and all the people around me need reassurance more than I do.

"Not that I know of, no," I nod, his answers are always definite. Our food comes and I get excited, it's not that I love food I just have a passion for it, I don't know when I can go back to thinking about being a chef but I want to. Now that I have a phone I google everything under the sun and that's how my data gets finished.

He gets up to go wash his hands and I settle for hand wipes, there's no way I'm getting up to get my hands washed.

Actually, maybe next time I should request a dish for him so he can wash his hands at the table, I laugh at that thought.

"I have been back for a minute now; you do this thing a lot is normal?" I blink and look at him, I don't know if it's normal, I wouldn't even have money to have it checked out.

"I don't know, but I'm okay" he nods clearly unconvinced but we not here because I zone out.

We start eating and I tell him about those plans I have, between the two of us, I always talk, I tell him that I google everything, he chuckles at that but I won't tell him that I tried to figure out where we would go today. My father and mother's separation that didn't go well, I didn't ask my mother the reason they separated the way they did, if my father knew my mother has lung cancer or even saw the symptoms at least while they were still together.

I taste a bit of his food without permission, he didn't look shocked or fazed, was he expecting that? But at least he's not making a big deal out of it.

"Makaziwe" my eyes look up at him and he puts down his beer, why am I nervous all of a sudden? Is everything okay?

"Yes?"

“I’m getting too old, please be my wife” I choke on my saliva, I didn’t expect him to say that, everything else but that. What does he mean I must be his wife? When did we go through the girlfriend and boyfriend stage? I don’t even know his family.

He frowns and I clear my throat, let me stir this conversation away from that statement.

“Why do you always frown at me?”

“Because you make me nervous, I don't usually get nervous so I don't know how to react to it” I nod, I also didn’t expect him to say that, and maybe I should stop keep on expecting things here.

“Okay” he looks at me.

“So you will be my wife?” the okay was for being his partner not his wife, Palesa would judge me for the rest of our lives.

“That needs a ring.”

“We can go get it” I laugh and shake my head, shouldn't we be saving for a house first or something like that?

“No, someday I will be your wife, not today” he smiles and I get relieved, we smiling, that means the answer is enough for him thank goodness.

“Thank you” I frown, for what? Agreeing to be his girlfriend even though he won’t say that word?

"For what?"

"Agreeing to being my wife."

"Mcebo!" he chuckles and I roll my eyes.

"Someday" he smiles and I finish eating, I'm not too much of a dessert person but he suggested I get it at takeaway because maybe I will feel like eating it later and it's a chocolate cake.

We on our way to his place now, he asked if we could go there but I sensed he was telling me rather, we got takeaways, more than we might even need but I love eating so I will probably eat more before I sleep. Now, I'm worried I have no clothes to change into, in the morning he has to drive me back home, I didn't prepare for any sleepovers.

He parks his car, his apartment is a bit further than home, its isolated and I actually kind of like that, I haven't been outside the busy and noisiness of the township, so this is something different. I can hear the night silence if that makes sense. He takes my hand and I blink, he's in front of me.

"Sorry" he shakes his head and looks around; he looks like he's looking for something.

"What's wrong?" He faces back to me and smiles, I respond with a smile and he looks into my eyes as if he's searching through them, I don't know what he's looking for but, I hope he finds the love I have for him somewhere there.

He cups my face and pulls me in for a kiss and I smile, I've never dreamt of kissing him before, and I'm glad I never did because it's perfect, him, he's perfect and everything he does. Why didn't he tell me he wanted to kiss me? I would have prepared to do so, I mean I have been longing for a hug from him. He kisses my forehead and hugs me and I stay in his arms. This place has a bit of a cold breeze so he lets go of me and I smile, I look red and he looks a bit amused by that. He wraps his arm around me and gets the takeaways and we walk to the building, it looks a bit modern, I love how refreshing this night has been.

We get in the elevator and we kiss again, I'm no different than him because I think I do want him as much as he wants me but I have to get it together, it's just our first date, I'm not sure if Palesa would judge me or what.

We get out and he frowns when he looks at the handle of his door, what now? Everything was going so well, did someone change the handle of his door?

"What's wrong? Is everything fine?" He clenches his jaw and opens the door; I didn't know it was open does he not lock? I follow him and my eyes land on a man with a girl cuddled up on the couch, oh, okay?

"Mzwandile" They look at us from the screen, that how's much they didn't notice someone walked in here, the TV is a bit loud.

Mcebo switches on the lights and Mzwandile jumps up and tells the girl to also get up, what's going on here?

"Did I give you my keys to do this nonsense?" I turn to Mcebo, he looks angry and I have never seen him this angry before.

"Mzwandile?" He's calm but I get startled and shift a bit.

"Sorry Madala, I thought you wouldn't be here today, please leave" the girl looks at him, she looks like she is protesting, what the heck? Does she not see what's going on here? Mzwandile grabs her arm and walks with her to the door and this time she shouts that she gets out and she quickly opens the door and gets out, what is the poor girl supposed to do now? Does she have transport to go home?

"Madala" he didn't finish his sentence and Mcebo grabs him by the neck.

"Mcebo" I say in shock and there's a silence, Mzwandile is not fighting back.

"Mcebo" I say a bit louder and he clicks his tongue and walks out and we stand there in silence. I'm not here to witness murder and I don't know what to say now, so this is Mzwandile?

"Hi" he massages his throat and looks at me, he fixes his tracksuit and I throw in a smile, it might not be the best thing at the moment but it's my first time meeting him.

"He's dramatic, we didn't even do anything" he walks to the couch and I look at him, we look like we could be around the same age or he's a bit older but I can sense he's a womaniser, I don't think what was happening here was innocent or that was his girlfriend.

"I'm sorry" I say and he changes the channel to a sport one and I stand there not knowing what to do anymore.

"Come sit Makazi before he strangles me for letting you stand" I laugh and he turns to me and I make my way next to him and sit, it's a long L shaped couch with a one seater at the other end; his place looks clean, much to my expectations and has a sliding door through the white lace curtain, I think that's the balcony.

"What do you like watching?" He asks, his eyes are still on the TV, I study his face and ignore his question, I noticed how they all have a lot of hairs on their eyebrows. I wonder how the last born looks if he looks like this because they always come out perfect from the trials and errors of the older ones.

"Anything is okay; can I use the bathroom please?" He directs me to it and I make my way in and closed the door. Mcebo has to come back, where has he gone to now?

I stay there until I hear more voices outside and I frown before closing my eyes and breathing out. I hope it's not more drama but I hear laughter, I know Mcebo's plans wasn't a gathering, I was planning we would cuddle and I eat my chocolate cake that I'm now craving for.

I flush the toilet after doing nothing I just wanted to breathe. I wash my hands and walk out and my eyes first land on a man wearing a cap and formal t-shirt with formal pants, who the heck dresses formal with a cap? He turns and I open my eyes a bit, he looks so much like Mcebo.

“Makazi, how are you?” he asks, he sounds completely different than he looks, he sounds educated, his voice is deeper but he sounds comfortable with me.

“I’m okay and you?” he smiles and nods.

“Mlungisi, I come after Nceba” I nod and he sips his beer, I haven't met Nceba so maybe I will one day. I walk to the kitchen and I see the takeaway plastic open, I look up at Mzwandile and there he is eating my cake I almost burst out, firstly what are they doing here? Now my cake is gone! Where is Mcebo!

“How was your night?”

“Okay, Mlungisi thank you, where is Mcebo?” I ask with a quick tone I’m still annoyed that Mzwandile is eating my cake and he naturally looks like he doesn't care, he’s drinking beer and eating chocolate cake! I am yet to see more things to question with these people.

“He’s coming back, he told me this one invited a girl in here” I chuckle and he shakes his head, I won’t mention he's eating my cake it’s enough drama.

“So, where's home?” I ask, I need to make sure this is not where they all stay I would lose my mind if it were.

“Wadesville” oh okay, thank goodness so that means they just here to visit.

I look for tea and I see Fresh Pak and I suck it up and make it. I’m very picky with the tea I drink and this one doesn't make the cut whatsoever. These two get comfortable on the couch with the sports channel and I wonder what I should do? Should I make food for them? I open the freezer and I find frozen chicken and I take it out.

“Mlu do you know where the rice is?” he gets up with his eyes stuck on the screen and I roll my eyes. He shows me everything and smiles and looks at me.

“You’re cooking?” Do I have a choice! I smile and nod and he makes his way back to the couch. I know their father stays back home alone, maybe he planned on cooking tonight and now they will come back full. How can one father look after so many children with no woman, where is their mother? Maybe I shouldn't play hero here. I go against my thoughts and I defrost the meat and get ready to make the rice. This is the first and last time I do this! They must thank my big heart.

The door opens and Mcebo walks in and frowns when he sees me pouring the rice in the pot.

"I'm cooking, I felt bad that they're here and might not have eaten yet," I whisper and he laughs, this is the first I have heard him laugh, I put down the cup and smile at him, it sounded so nice I want to tell him to do it again.

"Their father will cook for them at home" I smile and he kisses my head and watches me chop. He can't cook nor fry a perfect egg, so how much more chopping vegetables! I didn't expect him to help me; anyways its typical behaviour, I just wonder what his plan was with the pieces of chicken

I'm halfway through the curry, it's around pass 8pm now. The door opens and I frown this time, all three of them are inside with Mcebo studying what I'm doing like he is grasping something.

"It smells good in here" I look at the tall boy in school uniform and a girl follows him what is going on here now! More people!

"We came with bhut' Nceba, he's still outside" the girl says and she hugs Mcebo, this must be their sister? She looks so beautiful.

"Sis' Kazi you're cooking? There's takeaway" he opens the plastic, he knows me? So all these people know me and I don't know them? What if his father knows me as well and probably judged me? Oh my goodness!

The tall boy takes out my sushi and starts eating, he's old enough for me to not call him a boy but he's in uniform so.....

"You know Bab' Ngcobo didn't cook, can you believe it? Nceba just bought takeaway" so they depend on their father a lot I see.

"When did he come back?" Mlungisi asks getting up, now they will come hover the pots? I need some space or one of Palesa's wines.

"Today, he's just here for the weekend" he's finishing my sushi now he's on to the oyster's, how much appetite does he have? He looks at them with disgust and I smile.

"Try it" he shakes his head.

"No thank you Sis' Kazi, it looks like snails," I laugh and he finds steak to eat rather and the girl makes her way next to me. I don't know what to call them.

"Nosakhele and Nhlanzeko," I nod at Mcebo and I turn to her, she has their dark complexion and features.

"What grade are you doing?" I ask, it looks like I'm forced to know all these people now.

"Grade 7," I nod, she's still young but it's a pity she's tall like her brothers. The door opens and a man walks in, he's in overall pants and a Nike jacket. He closes the door and looks at me, he looks so rigid; I expected him to look hostile but not like this. He nods acknowledging me and I smile and nod and he greets Mcebo, and the rest. The fridge is full of beer I was shocked when I was looking for green pepper or any sort of vegetable.

I dished up with all the dishes I could find; I'm still full I just wanted my chocolate cake back. The older four would go out and come back from time to time but I didn't mind because Nhlanzi kept us entertained. He's doing his grade 11 at an all-boys school, he's such a breath of fresh air and very funny.

He washes the dishes with Nosakhele, I was still wondering how I was going to tackle them and the , but they just went on to wash them, they must be used to doing so.

Nceba walks in to say they must leave now, they don't have school tomorrow but maybe he has his own plans and I want the place to Mcebo and I. I think he must get back his keys from those that have it now. I noticed how Nceba looks very similar to Mzwandile, they look entirely the same only he looks angry 100% of the time and how Nhlanzi looks like his sister they all just look too much alike.

I walk them out, not that I needed to but I like Nhlanzi and listening to his stories. We head to a black Toyota Hilux and they get in. Mlungisi gets keys from Mcebo and he gets in the Ranger with Mzwandile and drives off. We walk back to the apartment and I get in and sigh.

"I'm glad they washed the dishes" he smiles and takes my hand and we head to the bedroom. I have a slight dilemma because I want to bath before sleeping, I can't just get in bed.

5

THE BEGINNING

Mcebo Ngcobo, that's his name, I prayed for him every day so God can grant him safety. I've been praying even now 7 years later I have been praying for him, for his safety even though I haven't seen or heard of him. The last time I saw him was when he had to drive to Kenya, every day I long for him and to see him, I went as far as going to his home in Wadesville, I got his address after asking about him, I went there hoping I would find him or his parents or Nhlanzi there and I didn't, I found new people living there.

I didn't know what to make out of it, where they could be? I still remember his flat and he wasn't there either, there was no trace of him. I check there once a year and the little family staying there has had enough of me but they wouldn't understand why I'm looking for him. I still remember the name of the school Nhlanzi went to, I thought I would find him but I didn't, I thought of that idea long after he matriculated.

It's been 7 years but I can't allow myself to think of the worst, the worst being that he died and no one told me about his death. Where are his siblings? Where is Mlungisi and why is there no trace of them? I got tired of looking, my mother told me to stop and she was right, I needed to focus on her again, she beat cancer 5 years ago but it came back with full force this time, we have never seen anything like it. I worked two jobs I got the cleaning job but it took a huge strain on me and I couldn't take care of her so I stopped, my Checkers job is enough for me. The old prick is still there forever shocked that I'm also still a member of the family, my picture is even up the wall, Palesa is a supervisor now.

I finish rinsing the clothes and I hang all my washing on the line and I make my way inside the room. My mother and MaGumede have become sisters; sometimes I don't even see her when I go to work. MaGumede's son extended her house into a beautiful four room house, that's the first thing he did with his first few salaries years ago.

I make my way to go check on the two women inside the house. I find them laughing at the TV and I smile and greet, I went straight into the kitchen and boil water for tea before MaGumede gets up and does all of that for me.

I finish making the tea and join them on the couch.

"How are you?" I smile and look at my mother then at MaGumz, I wanted to hear all of it when I have sat down.

"We okay, your mother is thinking of going to church with me on Sunday" I turn to my mother and she smiles, that would be great, she hadn't been able to go there for a while because of how sick she had gotten, I'm happy to see the change every time she's with her friend. MaGumede doesn't work anymore she stopped 3 years ago.

"I think that's a good idea, I have been meaning to go wash my hair today, the dandruff works again" my mother laughs; she says my poor scalp condition is from my father. I appreciate the hair but I can't braid it for more than a week because of the amount of dandruff I get.

I watch the TV while drinking my tea, they have been looking at me but I pretended as if I can't see them. I get up seeing they both fine and MaGumede stops me.

"Before you leave with my cup, your mother and I wanted to speak to you," I frown and sit back down and I hold onto the cup, MaGumede will never fail at being the "we need to talk" person.

"I might be staying with MaGumede" my mom says and I frown, I didn't see this coming when was it planned?

"You turning 29 we just think it's time you only take care of yourself," I look at my mother and she smiles, she always felt like she was holding me back even though there's no reason for her to think like that because I love taking care of her.

"I want to my kind" I look at MaGumede and she smiles.

"This house does get lonely I wouldn't mind living with a friend" I smile slowly, my mother looks happy with the decision and I won't hold her back, I just never imagined her to be someone else's responsibility but this is MaGumede we talking about. I didn't realize I'm even turning 29 this year I do feel a bit older and rusty like life just flew past me.

"If that's the final decision then I'm happy with it" I turn to my mother and she smiles.

"That was all, you can go now we will talk more about it later" I nod and made my way out sipping my tea, I leave with MaGumede's cups, now she says I want to have a collection of them in my room.

I call Palesa telling her to meet me at the salon and I walk there, it actually isn't a walking distance it seems a bit far, though it's not, I'm being dramatic it's just the hot weather, I can never stand how every day is hot in this place. I get my hair treated and straightened and Palesa meets me outside.

We take a taxi to the rank to go get some food and it parks for us to get out. Kgotso is still around and he still believes I'm his girlfriend it has never changed and I don't think it ever will.

We see a group of men standing and I spot two trucks from afar and I start running to them and passing through people.

"Makaziwe!" Palesa shouts and I ignore her. I trip over a cooler box and my knee lands on the floor and I groan in pain.

"Makazi! You will hurt yourself, are you okay?" She helps me get up, I bruised my knee and it burns. I look up at the men and I don't spot him or anyone I know.

"You need to stop doing this; the other day you bumped into an old lady and caused her to fall" I keep quiet and the man whose cooler box belongs to opens it, he sells cool drinks. He gets out ice and gets tissue for me and I look up at the men, I thought he would be there maybe this time.

"You have polony now for what!" Palesa shouts and I chuckle. She presses the ice on my wound and I hold onto her hand in response to the pain. She wipes my knee and decides we going home, maybe even that I never come to this taxi rank anymore. We get fish and chips and we get in the taxi and wait for it to get full, my knee is burning so badly but she has a plaster and Savlon in her house.

"Makazi" I sigh, I don't want her to speak about it.

"What Palesa?" I look away from the window and look at her and she sighs.

"He will come back but…"

"I love him, it will never change…"

Makaziwe

Let her be known

COMING SOON

10/01/2024