

so.

Oh and Gugu is wearing one of those hats, those big ones that side-chicks wear to their married boyfriends' funeral.

The service has already started, we are late.

"Let's go sit on those empty benches," I say pointing them to the back row on the left.

They have never seen the inside of a church house.

A teenage girl comes and asks the kids to follow her. I guess she's in charge of Sunday School.

We all fit in one bench, great, it will be easy to keep an eye on them.

Everybody stands up. They look confused.

"Stand," I whisper.

We sit down again. They're not even paying attention to the priest.

Everybody kneels.

I look at Nkosana.

"Do you know how much these pants are, I'm not kneeling," he says.

Can he just be a human being, just this once?

"Nqoba! kneel,"-Gugu

She looks at him until he gives in.

Hlomu gives them the look, they give in and kneel. I hear rumblings but at least they are rumbling on their knees.

We stand up. Sit down and kneel again.

"I want to go for a smoke," Mqhele.

"You'll smoke when church is done,"-Hlomu

Why are they behaving like we're abusing them?

I don't know any of the hymns being sung. People are reading from hymn books, we don't have any.

I'm starting to think we should have gone to one of those charismatic churches.....

"We are reading from John-12 verse two....." the priest says.

Hlomu takes out a bible.

"You have a bible??"-Mqhele asks

"Shhhhhhh"-Hlomu

"Where do you keep it?"-Mqhele

Hlomu rolls her eyes.

"Next to your gun,"-Hlomu

He raises his eyebrows

"You keep a bible in the safe?"-Mqhele

Can he just shut up please!

Hlomu turns to look at him.

"There's a gun in the safe? You have a gun in my house Mqhele?"-Hlomu

Oh oh.....

"Sshhhhh the priest is preaching,"-Mqhele

I hear Mpande and Mqoqi giggling next to me.

I give them a look and they stop.

It's time to kneel again.

"You're giving me sex for this,"-Nkosana whispers as he kneels next to me.

Yeah no, Catholic isn't for us, I must start looking for another church.

By the time we're done Mqhele has gone out twice to smoke.

None of them want to be here. But, amid the looks and the shock on some people's faces, an elderly woman wearing a purple poncho comes to us.

"I've never seen you here before, are you new in the area?" she asks looking at all of us.

"No, it's our first time here actually,"-Hlomu

"Where are you from?"-the woman

"We are from KwaZulu-Natal but we are based here in Joburg now,"-me

"Okay, what's your surname?" - she asks

"Zulu,"-Hlomu

"Ohhhhhh, you can come here anytime," she says

Just like that?

She looks at Gugu, longer than she looked at all of us.

"You look like my daughter. She disappeared years ago," she says.

Gugu smiles.

No one else is smiling.

## Twenty-Seven

I still think this should have been done at Hlomu's house, stuff like this is her responsibility, she always knows what to do and what to say. Ngcobo and Gumbi are already here, and so are the brothers. Sambulo arrived early in the morning looking like a lost soul.

It's been two months, a very long and emotionally draining two months. I think none of us expected it to last this long. Now we are waiting for Xolie's family to arrive and chances are, they won't be nice to us.

It was Qhawe's idea to call a family meeting. I don't know if it's going to change anything but he said at least it will get them talking.

"Girl, hi, I brought dessert," -Hlomu, she's just walked in with two chocolate cakes.

I haven't seen her in a while too, she's been focusing on Xolie a lot.

"How are the preparations going? Lloyd tells me the dress is almost ready," she says.

Yep, four weeks to go and I'll be walking down the aisle in a white dress, again, I hope I'll make it to the altar this time.

Gugu has been helping me with the preparations, Lloyd thinks it's his wedding and Langa will arrive a week early because "he wants to make sure everything is perfect."

Nkosana has absolutely no idea what the fuss is all about.

"Oh by the way, can I invite Thobi and Nana to the wedding? They're kind of part of the family," Hlomu says.

I've met them a few times. There's something about Thobi that makes me a little insecure but, you know, I could be imagining things.

"That's fine with me," I say.

Xolie is here.

There are two cars, one with just her and her parents and another with her three uncles and one aunt.

I'm crossing fingers that that this doesn't turn bad.

I direct them to the lounge when they walk in, Xolie stays behind with us in the kitchen. Gugu has just arrived too.

"Are you okay?"-Hlomu to Xolie

I don't even know what to say to her.

I hope she doesn't know that I've been secretly buying Mabutho clothes and toys and that he's slept here in my house several times. They get along very well with Mvelo. We can say whatever we want to say but they are brothers and there's not much we can do about that.

Sounds like the talking has started.

"Xolisile!" -someone shouts. It's probably one of her uncles.

She frowns, but goes there anyway.

We are also called in, I didn't want to be part of this at all.

"MaMzobe, what is going on?"-Ngcobo asks.

Why doesn't he ask Sambulo? He's the one who should be answering questions here.

"Ask Sambulo,"-Xolie

"I'm asking you makoti,"-Ngcobo

He's already pissing me off, it's only been a few minutes but he's already pissing me off.

"Okay, he decided to sleep around and have a child while at it, and he thinks he can bring that child to my house, he wants me to raise it,"-Xolie, she sounds very.....there's so much hate in the way she says it.

Silence.

"Sambulo, what happened?"-Ngcobo

All eyes turn to him.

"I made a mistake six years ago. I slept with a woman and got her pregnant. I should have told Xolie the truth there and then but I was scared she was going to leave me if I told her," he says

"So you've kept a secret for six years?"-Xolie's uncle.

Sambulo nods.

"Tell the whole truth now son,"-Gumbi

He takes a deep breath.

"The mother was from Vryburg in the North West, we were there on business for a few days. She worked at the guest house we were staying in and, I don't know, it just happened," he says

"It just happened?? Just happened Sambulo?"-Xolie shouts.

"Makoti please calm down, let him finish, we're here to resolve this, not to fight,"-Gumbi

I understand where Xolie is coming from.

"It was a mistake my love,"-Sambulo

I think she's way past the "my love" phase.

"Continue,"-uncle

He clears his throat.

"I didn't believe that the baby was mine so I didn't communicate with her after

she told me she was pregnant, until she sent me a picture of the baby two months after she gave birth. She threatened to send the picture to Xolie and tell her everything if I didn't take responsibility," he stops and looks at Xolie.

"So Mqhele and I went to Vryburg to see the child....."

The look Hlomu gives Mqhele!!!

"It was obvious that the child is mine,"-Sambulo

"So why didn't you tell your wife?"-uncle

"I tried, I tried so many times but we were so happy. I didn't want to hurt her, I can hurt anyone in this world but not Xolie, I love her more than anything,"

Shame poor thing.

"So how has the child been living for the past six years," -Gumbi

"His mother died in an accident when he was nine months old. They were originally from Botswana so his grandmother wanted to go back there with him. I knew that if they left chances were I was never going to see my son again. So we bought a house in Pretoria and moved them there," he says.

Xolie starts crying.

"I'm sorry Xolie,"-Sambulo

Can he just stop already?

"So he'd been living in Pretoria with his grandmother until she died two months ago and he had nowhere else to go," he says.

The shady-ness of men though.

"Do my children know him?"-Xolie

He takes a deep breath.

"Yes they do, they've known him all his life," he says.

She stands up.

"Xolie sit down!"- her mother.

"No, I'm done,"-Xolie

"What do you mean you're done?"-Sambulo

"Xolie please just..."-Nkosana

She turns to look at him. She's still standing.

"Please what Nkosana? Please what? You all lied to me for six years! You were all in on this, making a fool out of me! I thought I meant something to this family, that I was part of it but no, it turns out I'm just some woman who makes sure he has a home to go to and a warm meal. I have put up with so much Sambulo! So much and this was the last straw! All the women and your lies and..... I can't take it anymore, I'm done!"

"Makoti!!"-Ngcobo

"What??"

Whoah!

Hlomu stands up and pulls her by the arm. I think they went to the kitchen.

We all sit in silence until they come back minutes later.

"Sambulo, what do you have to say?"

He looks at Xolie.

"I'm sorry, I'm really sorry. Just give me a second chance.....and accept my child,"

Whoah! that last part! He should have left it out for now.

"It's not happening Sambulo," she says, stands up and walks out.

Hlomu and her mother follow her outside, but she gets in the car and drives

off.

I can confidently say that this meeting was a waste of time.

It's time to focus on Plan-B, if there is a plan B.

We've prepared lunch, so we serve our guests, very quickly because I want them to leave now.

-----  
"Nkosana, I've been trying to find Buhle but her number says it doesn't exist,"

He looks at me briefly.

"It means she changed her numbers and didn't tell you," he says.

No I doubt that, she seemed desperate to tell me something.

"I'm going to ask Mpande to find her," I say

He doesn't look impressed but hey, I want her to be at my bridal shower too.

Speaking of that, it was supposed to be a surprise but I found out, so now they have no choice but to get me involved.

My phone.

"Nokthula, hi,"

"Zah, hi, can you talk?"

Errrrr I look at Nkosana, he's busy on his laptop.

"Yes, I can talk,"

"Look I don't know if I'm overreacting but police were all over your father's house this morning. Uncle was with them. They took fingerprints and all that but I don't understand how that's going to work because he died months ago," she says.

I'm thinking about that pot-pourri on Lwandle's shoes.

"But, why now?" I ask.

"I don't know, but they say they have a witness, I don't even know who that witness is. It's all strange, I think your father died maybe trying to get out of bed probably, I don't know why uncle is desperate to prove it was murder," she says.

I say my goodbyes.

I have to speak to Nkosana.

He's calm as I explain to him what Nokthula said.

And then I tell him about the pot-pourri in Lwandle's shoes.

"The boys would never do something like that, why would they?"-he asks.

"I think they overheard a conversation between me and my aunt,"

He still doesn't believe it.

"You're home, great, what are we eating today?"

Really?

"Mpande what do you want? Don't you have a home?"-Nkosana

"I do, it's here," -Mpande

"I must change locks,"-Nkosana.

We were having a serious conversation, but now we have to drop it because the stalker is here, for what? I don't know.

"I don't care, I'll find a way in, I'll jump over the fence if I have to. I'll get a big rock, like the one behind the fence at Zandile's home, it makes things easier, just one climb and I was inside," he says.

Nkosana shakes his head.

I'm.....but.....how did he know about that rock? Nobody knows about that rock except me.

They've moved on to talking about something else but I'm still stuck on that rock issue.

And what does he mean "one jump and I was in"? Why would he jump over the fence to get to my father's house?

I remember seeing his car parked behind the fence that night but.....no, it can't be.

"Move!" he says pushing Mpande off.

And this one? When did he get here?

"Go get me a beer," he says to Mpande.

"Go get your own beer,"-Mpande.

"Hello Zah, it's nice to see you, only you," he says.

"Hi Mqhele, I didn't know you were coming over," I say

Why is he here again?

He makes himself comfortable.

I have to find something to do with my time.

"Do you have beer?"- Mqhele asks Nkosana

He looks at him.

"No, I don't have beer, especially not for you, why are you here?"-Nkosana.

I've been asking myself the same question.

"Can't I stop by to say hello to my brother?"

Geez.

"No,"-Nkosana

They laugh. They're so stupid sometimes.

"Hlomu is not talking to me, I'm not sure why, I've tried to think back but I just can't find it,"-Mqhele says.

Mpande laughs.

"Why are you laughing stupid, where is your girlfriend?"

They tease him about that all the time.

"I don't know, someone paid her to leave me. I don't know who or why but I'm going to find out," he says.

I thought he had let that go. That girl had better not talk.

"And what is this I hear about the police all over Zandile's home?"-Mqhele

Their voices are low now but I can still hear them from the dining room.

"What cops?"-Mpande

"Cops investigating Zandile's father's death, they think he was murdered,"-Mqhele.

"Zandile suspects it was the boys,"-Nkosana.

"What?"-Mpande

"But I'm worried, she had a blackout. I found her sitting in the car staring into space, she had been like that for two hours, I don't know what happened in between,"-Nkosana

He thinks it was me? No but.....

"No bafo, it wasn't Sis'Zah, or the boys....." Mpande

He says something but I miss it, I couldn't hear him properly.

"Mqhele, take care of it,"-Nkosana.

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“Parachutes Gugu?”

She's crazy!

“What's wrong with parachutes?”-she asks

“He's turning one, just one, he doesn't even know it's his birthday,”

This girl is crazy.

She put everything into this birthday party.

I understand why she would want to go all out but parachutes? No man.

There are our children, children of taxi drivers, children of hit-men, children of white lawyers, children hired from their parents by friends who don't have children. Basically, there are children all over the place and they are rowdy and noisy and out of control.

There's a man dressed in that annoying dinosaur Barney costume singing with the kids. There's a clown too and a whole lot of things I can't explain.

“It's hard to believe that he's one hey,”-Xolie.

Silence.

We all know what she's thinking.

“You know, I never got to thank you guys, for everything,”-Gugu.

It's fine actually, we'd rather forget about it.

“You survived, that's the important thing,”-Hlomu

Naledi is confused, nobody told her about this and we are not about to tell her. The poor girl might just run, first it was that Sambulo and Xolie saga, the Mbuba chronicles and then.....no, she's okay like this, clueless.

“Hey,”-Mqhele says hugging Hlomu from behind.

Where did he come from?

“Hi,” she tilts her head back and kisses him.

He turns her around to face him.

“Excuse me, there are children here,”-Gugu

They laugh and Mqhele leaves.

“How long have you been married?”-Naledi

“Almost 13 years now,”-Hlomu

That's long.

“Wow, and you're still inlove,”-Naledi

“Yes we are. And yes we've been to hell and back. We've hurt each other too but when we look back at it now, we realise it was a test we had to go through. Trust me, nothing is worth giving up on someone you love, on someone that completes you,” Hlomu

That's deep. I hope she's been telling Xolie that.

She's still mad, but at least now she talks and laughs with all of us, except Sambulo and Mqhele of-course.

He's here, and he looks horrible.

He's renting a house across their house in Houghton.

In a nutshell, he's become a stalker.

I saw Xolie looking at him a few times, she even dished up food and asked Lethu to give it to him.

He comes running in, sweating and breathing fast. The energy that this kid has though.

He goes straight to where the sink is and stands leaning on the cupboard, looking up at Xolie.



I'm thinking I should hurry up and pull him away from there before something bad happens.

"Mamiza," he says.

She doesn't turn around.

"Mamiza," he says again pulling her skirt.

She turns around and almost slaps him across the face.

Hlomu is the first to run and pull the kid away.

We're all shocked!

"Mabutho, come with me," -Naledi says walking out with him.

The poor kid looks terrified.

The interesting thing is he knows which one of us is supposed to be his mother, he always goes straight to Xolie.

I don't see Xolie anymore.

I'd like to believe that nobody saw what just happened, I'd like to believe that.

We go outside to join the party.

The colours and the noise and the chaos are hypnotising, but the prince just had to get the best party ever.

Mabutho is sitting on Mqhele's lap. It looks like he's forgotten what just happened.

"Where's Xolie?" -Sambulo

Sigh

Where's she by the way? I have to find her.

She's sitting alone in the pool-house sipping wine.

I'm not sure if I should go in or not, I walk in anyway.

"I can't believe I almost hit the child," she says.

Okay, I was just going to tell her to come join the party, talking about it was not part of the plan.

"I feel like, like I'm turning into a monster. I'm angry Zah, I'm so angry I feel like the only thing that can free me is death," she says.

Whoah!

"Xolie come on, you can't talk like that," I say.

She keeps quiet, I don't know what to say now.

"I hate being like this, I hate it. I hate myself for hating a child but it's just that....." she stops.

"Everyone makes mistakes Xolie. He would never hurt you on purpose, you know how much he loves you," I say.

I see tears. Eish.

"And that child, he adores you. He's desperate for your love and strangely he knows that you are the one who should be his mother. I know it's painful but we are all he has, and he's not going anywhere," I say.

She takes a deep breath.

"Don't get me wrong, but it's a blessing that his mother is dead because you don't have to deal with baby mama drama," I say.

She laughs.

"Why did she die before I could stab her bitch ass though?" she says.

We laugh.

"The kids love him," she says.

"He's their brother. And Sambulo has been apologising and apologising.....I

mean, just at least talk to him because it looks like we're gonna have to take him to Sterkfontein if you don't," I say

I think a part of her misses him.

"I'm starting to worry about what he might do, they took his gun but I'm still scared," she says.

I've thought about that too.

"Okay, let's go," she says.

Thank you Lord!

The last of the brood leaves just as it starts to get dark.

It's a beautiful summer evening.

We end up sitting inside the tent at one of the tables that were set for adults.

"I can't believe the jailbird is one," Nqoba.

What the heck?

"Really Nqoba?"-Hlomu

He has dark humour, naturally.

"I'm just saying, being born in jail is a special thing," he says.

He'll never change.

Gugu appears.

"Come here," he says stretching his arm. She does.

He sits her on his lap and doesn't say anything.

Xolie appears.

Silence and awkwardness.

She walks around the table and goes to sit on the empty chair next to Sambulo.

Shock.

Someone please break the ice by saying something.....

"I thought we were going to have dinner in the house, but I might as well tell the caterer to bring it here," Gugu

Oh by the way, she's the type that hires a chef when she has people coming over.

Nqoba says if it makes her happy, he's fine with it.

"Aren't you going to eat?" Naledi asks Qhawe.

He's been sitting staring at his plate. He hasn't touched his food at all.

"No, I don't want to eat," he says.

Huh?"

"You're not hungry?"-Naledi

"I am but I don't want food," he says.

We are all confused.

"What do you want?"-Naledi

She looks worried now.

"I want to change your surname,"-Qhawe.

Silence.

All eyes are on Naledi.

She looks at all of us, and then at Qhawe.

"Okay," she says.

That was so random.

"October 30 it is then,"-Nkosana.

They knew?

"October 30? That's in three weeks,"-Naledi

"Yep,"-Qhawe.

She looks a bit lost.

She'll understand soon enough. Her life is about to change, that's if it hasn't changed already.

We're having a wedding!

There are handshakes and hugs, smiles and blushes.

"We've got ourselves a Tswana makoti,"-Nkosana

I notice Naledi's face changing. The smile returns when Qhawe kisses her on the cheek.

What was that all about?

"Mqoqi when are you getting married?"-Mqhele

They're about to tease him I know.

"When you die,"-Mqoqi

The all laugh.

But me, I'm a bit uncomfortable with his response.

"Can you help me take these back inside,"-Xolie says to Sambulo.

She's talking about table cloths, but I know they don't need to be taken inside, I think she wants to talk to him.

They stand up and walk, we watch them until they disappear.

"She's not going to murder him right?"-Mqhele

Really?

We laugh. He's always been crazy.

"I'll take you to church again if you continue being funny,"-Hlomu

They swore never to go to church again. Not because of the kneeling and standing and them not understanding what the heck was going on.

It's about a woman who took them back years ago. Gugu would have figured it out if Nqoba had not deliberately forgotten to tell her that she's a clone of the woman he once loved.

## Twenty-Eight

**H**e's just sitting there with his arms folded looking bored. I tried to avoid bringing him here but it was going to inconvenience me. By the time we got in the car I knew we were going to have problems. "But, why do you have to fit, don't you know your size," he asked. I knew there and then that things were going downhill. It's just me and Niya, no bridesmaids, no maid-of-honour and no grooms-men, just us.

I made that decision as I watched people trying to take over my wedding, everyone from the gays to the cousins to the wives.

"Baba, look at me," -Niya says spinning around.

That smile on his face is priceless.

She runs into his arms and he holds her tight.

He was grumpy just now.

"Okay, perfect, now all you have to do is decide on the veil," -Lloyd

I never said I wanted a veil. I'm not wearing a veil, but I know he's going to bring one.

When we agreed that the wedding was going to be at our house Nkosana seemed fine with it. But lately he's been uncomfortable with people coming in and out of our yard.

The tent people came yesterday to measure the space they need. The caterers came to check where they were going to set up for a finger lunch and for the buffet afterwards.

He didn't want any of them there.

"We're done, Niya come, you have to take that dress off now," -Lloyd says.

She shakes her head and clings to her father.

This is going to be a battle. I know no child as spoiled as this one.

"You're going to wear it at the wedding Niya, take it off," Lloyd  
She doesn't budge.

"Mqhele," I say, defeated.

He says something to her and she walks over to Lloyd.

They're supposed to go to the hair-salon from here. Niya has to do something about that afro she has, and so I asked Mqhele to take her.

Hlomu said it was a bad idea but she didn't explain why.

"My love," she screams and runs to the door.

Oh, Langa is here.

"My love, I'm going to do my hair," she says.

Everything about Niya was quick. She started walking early, started talking early but the teeth, she was way over one before they came out.

The problem now is that she talks too much for a three year old.

Langa greets Mqhele and walks over to us.

"I found the pigeon guy," he says.

"Pigeon guy?"-me

"Yes, the guy who's going to release the pigeons while you two kiss,"

"Pigeons?" Lloyd

"Pigeons, doves whatever you call it," he says waving one hand.

Mqhele laughs.

I didn't know about pigeons. I don't want pigeons.

"And I found the strippers for tomorrow night, tall and dark like chocolate,"-  
Langa.

I nudge him with my elbow.

"Strippers?"-Mqhele asks.

The three of us look at each other.

"It's a bachelorette party Mqhele, they normally feature male strippers,"-Langa.  
He's brave.

"Oh really? Where exactly are you going to have those strippers,"-Mqhele.

"At your house,"-Langa

He's suicidal now.

"I see. If I find a naked man in my house, all over my wife, I will shoot him. Niya come let's go," he says and leaves.

Errrrrrr okay.

"Is he serious?"-Lloyd.

To be honest I also don't know.

"Nah, it doesn't matter if he's serious or not, he's gonna have to be strong,"-  
Langa.

I wouldn't take that chance.

My wedding dress is exactly the way I want it, now I'm just worried about the cake.

Xolie is handling the guest list.

Naledi is focusing on the décor people.

Gugu is the deputy-bride. We're going to have a problem when she finds out I came here without her. But, Langa seems to have stolen her job.

**"There are people here, what do they want?"** an SMS from Nkosana.  
Can he just lighten up already?

***It's the sound people. Mpande should be there with them***

*“They’re not coming inside my house right?”*-he says.

I'm not responding to this.

Next stop is the Spa. We are all meeting there. Hlomu will come with Nokthula and Zakithi. My aunt refused, she's found a friend in Hlomu's mother.

The ghetto aunt is not coming to the wedding, I must say I was a little sad about that.

This is the first time my family, except for Nokthula, have come to my house.

My aunt has been raving non-stop about how big it is and how we should have had more children because now it's empty and blah blah blah.....

“Lloyd, you're going to join us later right?”-me

He agrees but says he still has some work to finish.

-----  
Looks like everybody is here already.

Lulu's car is here too.

There's only one person missing, Buhle.

“Here comes the bride.....” Nokthula sings as I walk in.

What have they been feeding her?

“Too much Mojito,”-Gugu says

Oh I see, she's been cracking the whip here so she won't mind that I went dress fitting without her.

They all have cocktails in hand, except Zakithi. She claims she doesn't drink. And why is she dressed like that to go to a Spa?

“Lunch is ready,”

Great. I'm hungry.

Lulu pulls me by my arm. I didn't even say hello to her.

“Are you okay?” she asks.

She must be thinking that I'm worried about something going wrong.

“Yes, I'm perfect,” I say.

I still need to spend some time with her.

“What is this?”-Nokthula asks looking at her plate.

“It's salmon,” I say. That I will never forget

“Is everything ready?”-Hlomu

I think so.

“Mqhele said if we bring strippers to his house he will shoot them,”-Langa

Hlomu waves her hand

“He's not shooting anyone, he'll be drunk somewhere tomorrow night,” she says.

That's a relief. Mqhele will kill you for pinching Hlomu, that's how obsessed he is with her.

“Mqhele? Shoot someone? Noooo,”-Nokthula

She mustn't do this. Alcohol has gone way up to her head.

Everybody is looking at her now. This is gonna be bad.

“Huh?”-Hlomu

She smiles

“I'm just saying that the Mqhele I know wouldn't hurt a fly,” Nokthula

Okay, it's getting intense in here.

“The Mqhele you know?”-Xolie

She blushes and nods.

Someone please stop her!

Hlomu puts her fork down.

“And how exactly do you know that Mqhele?”-Hlomu

The thick air!

“Well, before you came with you perfect smile and perfect body and your.....he was my boyfriend, when we were eleven years old,” she says.

Silence,

And then laughter.

Hlomu is laughing. Whew!

“He doesn't remember me, of-course because there was about 20 of us,” she says and rolls her eyes.

“You're crazy, but you and I have something in common, it didn't go further than kissing right?”-Hlomu

Nokthula looks like she's thinking hard.

“No, but I think I would have given it to him if we weren't eleven and had no pubic hair,” she says. She's always been funny.

“Just like that?”-Gugu

“They were the Zulu brothers, we would have given them our jewels on a silver platter anytime,” Zakithi.

She's participating, nice.

“And which one was yours?”-Gugu

“The one that's yours now,”-Zakithi

Whoah! I think I remember her believing Nqoba was her boyfriend.

“Atleast we were 14,” she says.

How did this conversation get here?

“We're never letting those men go to Mbuba alone again. And you Nokthula, those hips and that ass are dangerous, stay away from my man,”-Hlomu

“Oh and just so you know, I also gave him my virginity on a silver platter. I had kept it safe for 22 years, and then came a bug-eyed taxi driver, he had it within two weeks,”-Hlomu again.

I'm happy this conversation ended like this.

We move on to the pedicure area, it's time to get pampered.

“I have a parcel for the bride”-one of the staffers say.

It's a bunch of flowers, roses.

“Thank you,” I say

There's a card.

“**I love you. We will make it to the altar this time. I promise,**” the note reads.

He's so sweet though.

An SMS

“***Mah, I need to talk to you.***”-Sbani

He sounds serious.

I stand up and walk to the dining area.

I'm already nervous about this

“Sbani,”

“Mah,”

“What's wrong?”

“Did baba kill Thabitha's father?”

Oh hell no!!!

“Sbani, where did you get that? There's no such thing! Who told you that?”-me

“I heard them talking,”

“You heard who talking?”-me

“Her uncles,”

“Where are you?”

“At her uncle's house in Durban, she said it was her friend's house. I found out now that it's her uncle's house,”-he says

Whaaat??

“Where are you?” I ask.

“In the bedroom,”

“Get out of there now! Where is Thabitha?”-me

“In the lounge, she's crying and fighting with her uncle,”

“Get out of there! Now!”-me

“I can't, they don't know I'm here. They want her to tell them where I am,”

“Hide,”-I say and run back to the Spa

“Hlomu!”

She stands up and rushes to me.

“Don't call Nkosana, I'll call Mqoqi,” she says after I tell her everything and leaves me standing there.

Please God, don't let them hurt my child!

-----  
“They're on their way home,”

That's how he wakes me.

Not that I was able to sleep at all.

“I told Sbani, I told him over and over again to stay away from that girl. But he wouldn't listen,” he says.

He's still angry.

“Anyway, Mqoqi and Sambulo were able to get him out of there without anyone getting killed,”- that's a relief.

But I won't be happy until I see him walking through that door.

“By the way, Mbuba is all over the kitchen,” he says

Does he have to be such a snob?

“They're making you breakfast, you should be happy,”-I say.

“I can't even walk around naked, in my own house,” he says.

He must go jump in traffic.

“Stop sulking, you're getting married tomorrow,” I say

He's still sulking.

Sigh.

I climb on top of him.

He lies still.

“Let's see how long that sulky face is going to last,” I whisper

“Mnnnnnmmmm,” he says

I'm about to fuck his brains out.

-----



Zandile

They walk in at midday with Sbani looking like a hobo.  
He looks angry, I'm not sure who he's angry at and why.  
His father is just standing there looking at him.

"What did I tell you?"-Nkosana.

Silence.

"Did I not tell you to stay away from that girl?"

Silence

He walks towards him.

Oh hell no! He's not hitting my child! Not today!

Sbani doesn't walk backwards. He looks like he's ready to fight.

"Bafo,"-Mqoqi

He stops.

"I hope you've learnt your lesson," Nkosana.

"I love her,"-Sbani

History is about to repeat itself.

## Twenty-Nine

**T**his is exactly how I felt that night 19 years ago.  
Nervous, worried, happy, scared and excited all at once, it was a few hours before my big moment.

Today is no different, I want to look him in the eye tomorrow and say those vows from deep in my heart.

I love him, I always have.

"Smiling to yourself? Is that happiness I see?"-Nokthula.

I forgot she was here. I'm lost in thought.

"I'm just thinking. Did I tell you that I was on my way to my wedding when I was arrested?"

She shakes her head.

"But I knew, do you remember that girl who used to live close to school? The one who was your friend?"

"Buhle?"

"Yes, Buhle, she came to tell us,"-she says.

I didn't know that.

She went all the way to Mbuba to tell my family? Wow.

I've been trying to get hold of her since that day she stood me up in Melrose Arch.

I gave up two days ago.

Even if I do get hold of her I doubt she'll make it to my wedding at such short notice.

"Hi, Nokthula,"

Huh?

It's Mqhele.

He's standing leaning on the doorway with his hands in his pockets. His

ankles are crossed and he is looking at Nokthula with a smile or a smirk or.....I don't know.

"Hi,"-Nokthula

She looks like she wants to jump out the window or crawl under the table or.....she's nervous and she's blushing all at the same time.

She won't even look him in the eye.

Really Mqhele?

He is looking at her, she moves her eyes, he follows them. Why is he torturing my poor cousin?

"So you dumped me when I left Mbuba?" he asks.

She almost drops the glass in her hand.

I think she wants to say something but she can't.

Mqhele and this thing that he has on women!! I have never understood it!

"No, you dumped me for a pretty girl from Durban," she says.

I laugh, I can't help it.

Mqhele shakes his head and laughs too.

"Where's Hlomu?" he asks.

"She's in the pool house," I say

He leaves.

Nokthula has this smile stuck on her face.

He remembers her. Her day has been made.

Lloyd is out there giving instructions, the others are in the pool-house setting up for the bachelorette.

The strippers are coming, Nkosana doesn't know about it. I don't even know if he is having a bachelor party or not, but Mqoqi wouldn't let an opportunity like this pass.

I meet Mqhele on my way to the pool-house. He's smoking as he walks. Hlomu must do something to make him quit.

"I'm leaving and I'm taking my kids with me because I have a feeling you're about to turn my house into a brothel," he says.

He always has something to say.

"Do that, we're getting wild tonight,"

He raises his eyebrows.

"Don't worry, Hlomu will still be alive and intact tomorrow morning, we won't scratch her or break her nail or....."

He laughs.

"Oh I never, you, Mqhele, I never thought there was a woman capable of tying you down," I say

He smiles.

"One afternoon at Bree, years ago, that's when everything changed," he says.

"I see you remembered your first love," I say

He laughs out loud.

"Not exactly, Hlomu told me about it and asked me to make her day,"

I laugh. He made her day alright.

"Get your shoes and let's go," he shouts to the kids.

"No baba, I want to stay with my-love,"-Niya

My-love would be Langa. They call each other that.

"We're going to get ice-cream," he says

“Okay,” she says running to the house to get her shoes.

Just like that.

“How are we doing here?” I ask when I walk in.

The first thing I see is a big white chair, I wonder what it's for.

“Is he gone?”-Langa

“Yes he's driving out the gate now,”-me

“Naledi bring the pole!”- he shouts

A pole?

“We're pole dancing tonight,”- Langa

Oh Lord!!

“The platters will be delivered at 6pm and the pop-up bar will be here at 7pm,”-Xolie

“They should have arrived at 9am,”-Gugu

Now that she drinks openly.....

“Where were you by the way?”-Hlomu

“I went to fetch Mabutho's things from Mqoqi's house,” she says and changes the subject immediately.

Okay, that's cool with me, the Mabutho subject is a sensitive one.

All is done and ready. Now we must get ready.

Lingerie, that's the theme for tonight. I'm not sure how that's going to work but I was bought a skimpy little thing with feathers.

Zakithi is against all this. I think is has something to do with “The Bible says.....”

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“Ready?”-Langa

“Okay, you sit here,”- He says pulling me to the big white chair.

Two very dark men walk in. There are cheers.

Nkosana won't like this at all.

“No videos, no pictures,”-Lloyd

I think that's better.

“I'm next on that chair,” Thobi

She's wearing the skimpiest of them all.

Zakithi is sitting there with her arms folded, she's wearing pyjamas, Hlomu is trying to get her drunk.

Okay, so what happens now?

Whoah!

“Langa!!”-I shout

The guy is sitting on my lap facing me. He's wearing only his undies, how did he strip so quickly?

He's gyrating! Oh My God!

He takes my hand and places it on his chest. Oh wow, this is soft and smooth.

“You can touch,”- Naledi

What is wrong with these girls?

He stands up, turns around so that his bum is on my face.....and then he twerks!

These bitches here are cheering.

There are men who do this for a living?

There's two of them now, each on either side of me.

I touch, they said I could touch so I'm touching. This is an opportunity not to be missed, these men are perfect!

"I'm next!" -Zakithi shouts.

Hlomu has succeeded in her mission of getting her drunk.

I can't miss this.

I stand up and she sits on the big chair. She has a cocktail in her hand.

Why does she look so comfortable with this all of a sudden? She's touching everywhere, the thighs the bums the.....okay, this is getting kinky now.

Nokthula and I look at each other.

"What is this?"-a voice says at the door.

Oh crap!

"What's going on Hlomu?"-she asks

It's Hlomu's mother. She wasn't supposed to be here tonight, she was supposed to be at my house with my aunt.

"Mqhele is in the main house, I don't want him coming in here and seeing this nonsense in his house,"-she says.

Really? I think she's overreacting. It's a bachelorette party so no we are not knitting jerseys.

We listen to her anyway, and the strippers leave.

"Now what?"-Nana

Hlomu's mother though!

"Sorry Zakithi, you were getting your groove back there,"-Xolie

She looks a bit embarrassed.

"Yes, it's a rare opportunity," she says.

We all laugh.

"Come on you have a man, I don't"-Zaba

Her face changes to serious.

"I haven't had any, from him, in five years,"-Zakithi

Okay she's really drunk.

"Why?"-Naledi

"Diabetes, he has diabetes and basically, it's like a sponge down there," -she says

I know we all want to laugh at the sponge part.

She laughs first and we all follow.

"Five years without sex?"-Xolie

She looks at all of us.

"I said I haven't had any, from him,"-She says.

Whaaaat???

Nokthula looks at me. We're shocked. She's the moral guru of the family.

"You look shocked, do you mean you guys have never.....you know, just a little?"-Zakithi

We shake our heads.

"I went without sex for 17 years, but I was fine," -me

"That's a long time," Nana

"Yes, but you learn to satisfy yourself, there's nothing a finger can't do,"-I say  
I'm the master of masturbating, I know all angles.

"It's funny that it takes one minute when you do it yourself, but takes 15 minutes when a man does it to you,"-Thobi

Okay, we're having sex talk.

"I don't know what it feels like,"-Nokthula

"Huh? What are you talking about?"-Hlomu

She looks at all of us before she speaks.

"Orgasm, I don't know how it feels, I've never had one,"-Nokthula

Noooooooooooo!

"What??"-Hlomu

"You're lying!"-Lulu

"I'm serious, I've been having sex since I was 17 but I still don't know what it is exactly that I'm supposed to get out of it,"

Yeses! What a waste!

Something needs to be done about this situation.

"Nokthula, come sit here," I say pointing her to the big chair.

She does.

"Sit up straight,"

She does.

"Cross your legs,"

She does.

"Bend forward a little,"

"Yes, now squeeze tight. Not the legs, squeeze where the thighs begin," I say.

Silence in this room!

"Focus Thule, focus on what you are feeling," I say.

Everybody is watching her.

"Mmmmm....."-she says. It's coming.

"Squeezeeeeeeeeee,"

Her hands are pressed on the chair. Her mouth is open.

"Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh," she moans. Her knees are shaking.

She's just had her first orgasm.

"Who needs a man?"-Naledi

We all laugh. Nokthula is still trying to compose herself.

"Don't get addicted now,"-Hlomu says.

These girls!

Another round of drinks.

Xolie asks for juice, it's a miracle!

"Aren't you drinking,"-Hlomu, her partner in alcoholism.

She shakes her head.

We stare at her. She's being shady right now.

"Sambulo came over, we talked, we fucked and I got pregnant," she says, just like that.

"Whaaat?"-Hlomu.

"Yep,"-Xolie.

"So did you talk and then fucked, or did you fuck and then talked,"-Gugu

"I don't remember. No actually I pulled his clothes off the moment he closed the bedroom door,"

Whoah! Hectic!

"You guys are like incubators,"-Langa.

We all laugh.

We have been accused by the media of "always being pregnant".

"The more the merrier they say,"-Hlomu

"Oh and Mabutho is going to live with us now,"-Xolie

Silence.

"Who is Mabutho now?"-Langa

Whew!!!

My phone.

It's Nkosana.

"Hello groom,"

"Hi, you're not up to no good there right?"-he says

I laugh first, maybe I should tell him about the strippers.

"No, are you okay? Where are you?"-me

"I'm fine, Mpande took us to some strip club, you don't want to know,"-he says

"Oh nice, we had strippers here too,"

"What?"-him

"I'm joking,"-I say. He's still suspicious though.

"Mqhele had the rings, but he accidentally left them on the kitchen table there in his house, can you make sure they're safe please," he says.

Oh okay.

"I want you alive and fresh tomorrow, and don't do anything I wouldn't do with those strippers,"

He laughs.

"If you let me come over for a quickie....."

I say my goodbyes. I think the rings will be safe anywhere but.....

"Hlomu, Mqhele left the rings here, I have to put them in a safe place, can you put them in your bedroom," I say.

"Just put them in the safe Zah, I'll give you the combination," she says

Oh, okay, she can't leave alcohol for five minutes! Just five minutes.

I realise as I punch the numbers that they make out Mvelo's birthday.

I expect to find a gun and I'm laughing thinking about that church incident. There isn't much in here, just a pile of papers.

I think it's a marriage certificate and the children's birth certificates. But there's one.....

My curiosity overpowers my conscience, I'm just going to read the first paragraph.....

*Dear Family*

*I don't know if I can call you that,  
I was never really welcome or liked here.*

*It has been a long 14 year battle for all of us. There were days  
where I thought about packing my bags and leaving, just disappear  
and never come back.*

*But where would I go?*

*I know you all think I stuck around because I needed Nqoba's  
money, but the truth is, I have nowhere to go, you are the only  
family I have.*

*I've made mistakes, we all have. No matter how successful we  
become we will always be broken, and now and again it will show.*

*Hlomu*

*-I'm going to be honest and say I never liked you from the start.  
That's because you represented everything I was not, everything I  
never had.*

*You had innocence, a heart that could love, a home, family and a  
man who loves you.*

*I know who he was before you, and I saw how you turned him into  
a human being. Your love is rare and it is beautiful, but I want you  
to always remember that there's a part of him that can never be  
fixed, always bear that in mind because now and again it will show  
itself.*

*I'm sorry I involved you in that abortion thing. I'm sorry I asked  
you to help me "deal" with a dead body.*

*I'm sorry I told you about Mqhele's affairs. Most of these things  
were done to hurt you, but I can't say it made me feel any better  
about myself.*

*Mqhele*

*-I hope you don't end up treating your wife like you treated  
Nokzola. And just so you know, there was never a child. But she was  
desperate to be with you and that was the only way you were going  
to pay attention to her. But when you chose Hlomu even after she*



Zandile

*told you she was having your child, that was her breaking point.*

*I know you are probably arch enemies now but I wish that one day you make time to apologise to her for everything you put her through in the two years you were together. That's all she's longing for, an apology.....*

*Nkosana*

*-You must tell Zah the truth. She will understand. I know how deep your love for her is and I know how deep hers for you is. She will understand and eventually she will find it in her heart to forgive you....*

*Just tell her the truth.....*

## Thirty

**Y**ou have to go now, it's time," I say hoping that maybe at least one of them will raise their face and give me some reaction, some assurance.

But they don't move. They've been sitting here with their elbows resting over their knees, their heads bowed.

I want to tell them that everything will be fine, that they will never go back where they came from and that we're okay now, we are at a great place, a safe place in our standards. But it would be pointless.

"Nkosana, it's time," I say looking at him. But he keeps his eyes down, the palms of his hands pressed together. If I didn't know better I'd say he's praying, but he keeps pressing both his pointing fingers to his lips.

Nqoba and Mqhele are sitting on either side of him, staring down too.

In situations like this, when one of them needs comforting, Nkosana is always the one who puts his hand on their shoulder first, but nobody ever does that for him.

I think they know he doesn't want to be comforted, he doesn't want to seem like he is breaking down, like he's helpless.

Maybe I should just leave them alone, but then if I do, what am I going to tell people.

None of them want to look at me, or respond to me, not even Ntsika.

I walk on to lean against the wall at the far end of the room. This dress was custom-made, but I don't care anymore, I slide down the wall all the way until I'm sitting flat on the floor.

We've been in this room for three hours, I've left and come back four times and each time felt like things were worse than they were when I left them.

How is it that I have so much responsibility in this life? That every time we are in a situation like this everybody looks at me and expects me to fix everything?

"I'll do it," Mqoqi says, finally.

"No, I'll do it myself," Nkosana says, his eyes still on the ground, but he doesn't stand up.

We haven't made much progress here.

If this was ten years ago I'd be sitting here crying my eyeballs out, but I've learned to be tough, and I've learnt that in this family we are not entitled to happiness, it's like a curse they were born with.

We were happy yesterday. Today was going to be a great day that we had all been excited and looking forward to. Nkosana was happy, I don't think I had ever seen him happier.

There's a knock on the door. I jump up, everybody else sits still.

"Gogo is calling you," Phakeme says peeping through the door with just his head. He moves his eyes around the room through all of them. I see the confusion on his face but if I had to explain this to him, I wouldn't know where to start.

"Come on, let's go," I say pushing him away from the door and closing it behind me.

"Where is gogo?"

"In the house, upstairs with mah," he says.

I thought he was going to walk with me all the way there but he turns and walks to the garden. It was stupid of me to expect an 11 year-old to stick around in a situation he senses is bad.

I feel all eyes on me as I walk past a group of people standing around wondering what the heck is going on and all the way to the entrance steps.

I bump into Lloyd, Langa's friend at the door.

"Hlomu, what is...?"

"I'll be back I can't talk now," I say rushing past him.

I lift my dress and run up the stairs, ignoring the stares I'm getting from these people, some I've never even met in my life.

"Mah..." I say barging in the bedroom.

She's sitting on that chair facing the mirror, she's not supposed to be sitting on that chair.

"I've told them that there's nothing we can do now. But they won't listen,"

They all stare at me.

"What exactly is going on Hlomu?"-mom.

She should have figured it out by now, isn't it all clear?

I ignore her, she's going to have to forgive me for that.

The phone has been off since last night, everything they've tried has been unsuccessful.

They called everyone they know and even went out to try themselves, but they returned empty handed. I don't know what to do anymore.

"They're leaving the pool-house," Xolie says. She's standing by the window.

We all rush to her. They're walking, Nkosana in front and all of them following him including Sbani and Lwandle.

We all stand in silence, wondering where they are headed because they've just walked past the walk-way that leads to the garden.

"They're coming here,"-Xolie.

Yes they are. I wonder what's next now.

"Let us pray," my mom says.

No offence but I don't think God will pay attention to any prayer that has to do with this family. We let her pray anyway. The problem is she doesn't know what exactly she has to ask God to do for us.

The bedroom door opens, it's Mqhele. He signals that I should come to him.

I raise my eyebrows when I reach him, he knows what I'm asking.

He pulls the door closed behind me and we both sit on the floor at the passage. He's loosened his tie but the suit is still intact.

He's sitting with his knees up and I'm sitting with my legs stretched.

"Why do these things always happen to us Hlomu? Why us?" he asks.

I wish I had an answer for him, but I don't.

I wish I could tell him there was still hope but I'd be lying. We were supposed to start at 11am, it's now 5pm.

On top of having to deal with these people here, there are scores of people waiting for us in Mbuba. They are looking forward to a joyous celebration.

"I think we should serve lunch now, just so.... I don't know, just so these people can leave," I say.

It's not what he wants to hear, he wants me to tell him that we should wait longer and that things could change any minute from now.

They are all there, standing with their arms on the rails and looking down at the floor. This house is three-storeys high.

They are standing outside his bedroom. He's locked himself in. Lwandle is standing just next to the door, he keeps placing his ear on the door, I think he's trying to hear what is happening inside.

"Mqhele, did you take his.....?"

"Yes, Nqoba has it," he answers before I can finish.

Good. I don't want a repeat of that incident from years ago.

"There's media at the gate," Langa, I don't know where he came from.

Mqhele is on the phone immediately.

"Nobody comes in and nobody goes out of that gate," he says and hangs up.

I assume he's talking to gate security.

Langa is still standing. Mqhele raises his eyes once and Langa rushes off. He's grown to know him very well.

"Stop running! Stop it!" I shout.

They all stop and look at me before walking down the stairs slowly. These kids are going to drive me nuts! They're still dressed up, they have no clue what is going on and why we all look so drained.

"Mabutho tie your shoe-laces," I say

"Yes mami," he says and bends down to tie them.

He's struggling with it until Naledi comes up the stairs and helps him.

There is Bab'Ngcobo coming up the stairs in some brown pants and a black leather jacket, couldn't he not look like a typical taxi owner for just one day? Just one day!

I hope he doesn't come to us because I'm tired of being asked questions.

He goes to that group still standing outside Nkosana's bedroom. They all gather at once and he talks while they listen. I think he's telling them what I have been trying to tell them this whole time.

It's hard, I know, but some things can't be controlled, and the sooner we all accept that the better.

Ngcobo knocks on Nkosana's door but it doesn't open. He gives up after a few minutes and goes to stand with the rest of them.

Nkosana said he was going to do this himself and we all know not to go against his word.

So what do we do except wait for when he's ready?

Lloyd appears again with that big bag of his. He stops in-front of us to say something but I guess he realises that the atmosphere is not welcoming because he walks on to the bedroom without saying a word.

I hear Gugu's voice somewhere in the house. She's giving instructions to these strangers walking around the house putting and removing things.

She's the one that's been interacting with them, we've all just been worried about

Nkosana.

Mqhele's phone beeps.

"He wants to talk to you," he says.

Huh?

"Me?"

"Yes, he wants to talk to you," he says.

I'm confused. But he stands up and stretches his hand. I take it and he pulls me up from the floor and leads me to Nkosana's door.

They all turn to look at us, with questioning faces as we approach and stop to knock on the door.

It opens and Lwandle screams.

"Baba!!!"

"I'm fine boy, I'm fine," he says, pulls me inside and closes the door. He locks it.

Why am I here? I have no solution.

He goes to stand by the window and looks outside, his suit is still intact, he hasn't even loosened his tie or unfastened the double-breast waist-coat.

His back is turned on me, his hands are in his pockets.

"Am I a bad person Hlomu?" that's the first thing he says. How is it that he speaks so calmly?

I sit on the bed. Where do I start?

"Am I?" he asks, firmer, still looking out the window with his back on me.

"No Nkosana, you're not a bad person," I say.

"So why can't I ever find happiness, why do I keep losing Hlomu?" he asks.

I don't know how to answer this, so I take a deep breath and keep quiet.

"Let's talk about the things I've done, to people, to families, to....." he stops.

"Is it coming back to haunt me? Is this the prize? My punishment?" he asks.

I want to run.

"The one thing, just one thing that I've ever wanted in my life, I can't have," he says.

I still have no words.

"Talk, you have all the answers, you know things and you fix things and you make things right. Right now I need answers and you're the only person I know that can give them to me," he says.

Why is he doing this to me? How am I supposed to know what to say?

"Talk to me Hlomu, I listen to you, I've always listened to you," he says.

I'm getting a bit scared now. He's acting really creepy. Where is Mqhele?

"You've survived worse than this Nkosana, you'll come out of this too. I know you," I say.

"Worse than this? Nothing is worse than this," he says.

Why isn't he turning around to look at me, it's like talking to a ghost.

It's the truth that he has survived worse, but I don't really know if he can survive this.

"What should I do now?" he asks.

"You should accept it, for now, and go tell those people to leave. Forget what they are going to say, you'll still have us, your family even after all this," I say.

He turns around and looks at me.

He walks to me.

He's coming close, too close. I stand up swiftly and almost bump my head on his chest.

He wraps one arm around me, and another and puts my face on his chest, he's a little taller than Mqhele. I don't move my arms, I have them on my chest.

"Okay, I'll do that," he says, gently pushes me off and heads to the door, leaving me standing there. When he opens the door everybody is standing there.

He turns to the left, they follow him.

"Let's go," Mqhele says standing at the open door.

I rush to him.

I'm a bit puzzled, was I just hugged by Nkosana? Just after he went psycho on me?

We follow them, but just as we get to the stairs I make a decision.

"Go, I don't want to be part of this. I don't want to see it, go I'll stay here," I say.

He hesitates a little and then lets go of my hand. He rushes down trying to catch up with the others.

I walk back to the bedroom where my mother and Xolie are. There's Gugu and Langa too. I'm not sure where Naledi is.

"He's going to tell them," I say and throw myself on the couch. I'm still barefoot, I'm not even sure where my shoes are.

"Oh dear God!" my mother says and lies back on the dressing-table chair.

We all sit in silence. Xolie is still by the window.

"Yes, there they are walking to the garden," she says.

This is it. It's over. I'm not looking forward to the beginning after this.

We all just sit in silence. There's nothing left to say or do now.

"Where's my dress?" a voice says.

We all turn around to look at her. She's wearing a sweater and gym pants, her hair is a mess. We all stare at her.

"Where is my dress?" she says walking on to the dressing table where my mother is sitting.

We are still quiet. Shocked.

"Where is the hairdresser?" she asks again.

Langa runs out of the room in high speed.

We all return to our senses and start moving frantically. I run out of the bedroom.

"Lloyd!" I scream as loud as I can.

He responds from downstairs.

"Come here! Quick! Bring everything!" I shout.

Now I have to find the hairdresser and the make-up lady.

I see Langa through the passage window racing to the garden and grabbing Mqhele's

Arm.

I run downstairs. I find the hairdresser packing his brushes away. Good, they're both here.

"Guys, come, she's here," I say, rushing them.

They pick up their cases and follow me.

Gugu is already helping her put on the dress.

"Make the eye shadow dark, my eyes are a bit puffy," she says to the make-up lady. She is so relaxed and so calm like she didn't just put us through hell.

"I'm going to get dressed," my mom says leaving the room. I hadn't even noticed that she was the only one who was still not dressed up.

I have to go find the kids, and my shoes.

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The violin starts playing. Mqhele holds my hand tight, I turn to look at him, he smiles and winks at me and then his smile becomes wider as he sees his princess walking down the white carpet.

She is too cute in a princess dress, but she's not sprinkling those flower petals, she's literally throwing them on the ground with the biggest smile on her face.

"She's grown so much," he whispers in my ear.

She's three-years-old and she's brought so much joy to this family.

She is like a real-life princess. I swear if she said she wanted the moon these people would hire a spaceship and astronaut to take her there in a flash.

She has my complexion but everything about her is her father from her gigantic eyes to her laughing at the smallest things.

Mqhele doesn't want her to go to school, he says what if she falls and gets hurt or if the other kids bully her or if she gets lost or something. It's all so stupid I tell you and chances of anyone bullying her are slim because being always surrounded by boys has made her a little fighter.

She walks straight to Nkosana and stands in front of him, he puts his hands on her shoulders and they both stand and watch.

And there she is.....

Mqhele holds my hand tighter, I think this reminds him of us about 13 years ago.

She walks slowly, her eyes glued to Nkosana's, I think she's getting emotional judging by how she keeps blinking, she'd better not mess up that make-up.

She was better when she couldn't cry, but now she's become an emotional wreck.

She's walking alone, holding the bouquet with both her hands too close to her chest.

Her father died last year and I'm going to be honest here and say, I was happy. That old man, I think even the evil satan did not let him inside hell because he's afraid he'll take over.

There are no bridesmaids too or grooms-men, it's just the two of them and Niya as a flower-girl.

Mqhele leaves my side and goes to stand next to Nkosana, it's a familiar scene, he's patting his back. He stands there until Zandile is standing in-front of both of them. Nkosana moves to stand next to her.

Mqhele comes back carrying his daughter, we all sit, with Niya on his lap.

Everything here is beautiful. It's a small intimate wedding, but I think it's going to be the most emotional one we've ever had in this family. These two, Nkosana and Zandile, they are the true definition of true love, soul-mates and living proof that you can only ever truly love one person in your life.

There were so many things we had to deal with after Zandile came out of jail.

This was hurtful to her and Nkosana but not as hurtful as it was to their children. I had always said hiding this from them was a mistake. They were only told the full story when she came home, by her, and as they were still trying to come into terms with it, it was told to the whole world by the media.

But we are the Zulus, we've survived worse, and so we survived that too.

They got married only days after she came home, well, it was a trip to Home Affairs by just four people and lunch later but it was love.

And then they started behaving like love-struck teenagers, which they're still doing over two years later but we've all accepted that they are catching up on time and love lost.

Somewhere in-between they managed to make time for today, a white wedding which

Zandile insisted on because you know, every girl wants that moment where she walks down the aisle and publicly claims her man before God.

They also had to do the whole traditional wedding process because if a ghost, yes a ghost.

Mqhele kisses the top of my head and tightens his arm around me, his face is serious and I think he might get emotional just about now.

Oh, it's the vows moment, my mind was far away I almost missed this.

They're standing facing each other, holding each other's hands. The bouquet is now on the chair.

Zandile is smiling, but her eyes are wet.

"You waited for me," she says looking into his eyes.

"I would have waited for you all my life, but you came back to me, and here we are now," he says.

They're looking at each other like they're the only people here, like the world is theirs and theirs alone.

"Was it guilt?"-Zandile

"No, it was love,"-Nkosana

Okay.

"I told you to move on," she says, laughing.

"You knew I wasn't going to," he says, smiling.

These two are having a conversation, in-front of a priest, what kind of wedding is this?

"I'm ready to be your happily ever after now," she says.

"You've been my happily-ever-after since I was 17-years-old," he says.

Okay you two, we're here.....you're supposed to be saying the 'in sickness and in health' thing not this.

"We've done it all, survived it all. In good and bad times, in sickness and in



health, in wealth and in poverty, we've survived it all Nkosana, what's left to say?" she says.

I understand what she's saying but I'm also a bit confused as to why the priest is here, because obviously his role is not being acknowledged.

"I love you," he says.

"I love you more," she says.

The priest shakes his head and says: "who's got the rings?"

Mvelo the grandchild stands up and walks to them with a small white pillow in his hands.

His front teeth are missing, he looks exactly like Mvelo, the one he was named after.

That's a rather huge diamond! But this is Zandile, she loves the finer things in life.

You can see relief on all our faces when the words "You are now husband and wife" are pronounced. It has been one heck of a day.

I turn to look at Mqhele.

"The flower-girl has to go back to her duties now," I say.

"She's sleeping on the job," he says brushing her back.

Niya though! How on earth does she fall asleep in the middle of a ceremony with 60 people and a loud priest talking through a microphone? It must be the warmth of her father's arms. I know, I fall asleep in them a lot.

"You're going to have to wake her, it's time for pictures, where are the boys?" I ask.

He frowns.

I could explain to him that waking her won't hurt or traumatize her, but I would need a whole bottle of wine after that.

"I hope this won't take long," he says.

Yes, I know he hates taking pictures but it never killed anyone.

It was the best decision to have this wedding at Zandile and Nkosana's house, although it must be weird for them to have people walking in and out of their home but the convenience that comes with it makes it all worth it.

"Whew! That was hectic!" Lloyd says fanning himself. He is a designer slash stylist slash event organiser slash 'I'm here and you're going to see me' kind of guy.

He went to UCT with Langa, they are best friends. He also studied economics but can't tell you the difference between stock-market and interest rate.

"I have a UCT student number, my records are there forever, it doesn't matter that I got there and attended only 30 classes the whole year and slept with the lecturer and almost started a strike and....." he always says. It's a very long list of why he was at university for five years and still doesn't have a degree.

"You did a great job boo," I say giving him an air-kiss.

"I know boo, this one is easy to work with, she's like an alien, does she eat the same food we eat?" he asks.

We both laugh.

I'm used to these kinds of comments, Zandile is a freak of nature.

I feel an arm around my shoulders.

"Let's go, I found the boys, the picture hell is about to start," he says with a bored look on his face.

When I turn around Lloyd has disappeared.

I see my mom over there giving instructions to caterers. She takes over, wherever she goes.

"Where have you been?" I ask Lethu. I haven't seen her all day. She looks exactly like our mom.

"You live to stalk me, don't you?" she says pulling a young guy by hand and walking past us like we are random distant relatives.

"Is that...? Did she come here with a man?" he asks.

Really?

"She's 26 Mqhele, of-course she came with a man," I say.

He seems to not get it at all.

We are the last to get in the family picture. We had to run when Lloyd shouted and hushed us to hurry up. He's also in charge of this, self-appointed but in charge, much to the annoyance of the hired professional photographer.

"We must make this quick, it's going to get dark soon,"-Lloyd. He is that aunt that every family needs to have, whether related or not.

The newly-weds are all over each other, smiling and looking into each other's eyes.

Zandile once accused me and Mqhele of being weird but I think that's them, weren't we about to announce that the wedding has been cancelled just an hour ago? And now, it's like we never went through that shit and this man of hers didn't just go psycho on me?

We pose and smile and pose until we all look more irritated than happy. It's getting dark, the buffet is ready, my mom is pointing everyone to the tent and she's not taking no for an answer from anyone.

I've been trying to avoid my uncle all day. I pleaded with my cousin, yes that one, to make sure he doesn't go anywhere near alcohol, I don't want him embarrassing me in front of my in-laws like he did at Nqoba and Gugu's wedding

The reception tent is at the back of the house, on top of the swimming pool. This has

Lloyd written all over it.

He put the stretch-tent over the rectangle pool and tables and chairs on both sides, with the main table in the front, a chandelier in the middle and floating lamps inside the pool.

It's beautiful, I don't know how he thought of the lights because this was supposed to be a day-wedding.

"I should have organised a bridge to go over the pool so that they were going to walk over it when they make the grand entrance," he says.

Oh Jizas! He's on steroids.

We are all seated and waiting for the couple of the night to walk in. Niya has retired and is sitting on her granny's lap. We are all seated on the first two tables in front

There is Peter there with his latest wife. We've been to three of his weddings. They all come with blonde hair and long legs.

I always say he is like the 'tokoloshe' of this family. He fixes dodgy problems and knows everything.

Here they come....

Zandile has changed to a gold dress that's just above her knees. And Nkosana

is in just a shirt and black pants. They make such a perfect couple.

We all stand up. I expect a house song to play but no, it's Joe Nina's "Precisely".

Now, let's see Nkosana dance.....

It's exactly what I expected, the grey-haired man has two left feet.

I wonder if they've spoken at all about the fact that their wedding almost didn't happen, again. They look so happy.

Someone snatches the microphone away from Lloyd, now he wants to be the MC? Lord help us!

There are only four speakers on the programme, Bab'Ngcobo, Mqhele, Lulu and my mother. I insisted on speeches because we weren't gonna have a wedding with no bridesmaids and no speeches too? We are weird and those that love us have accepted that but we must at least try to co-exist sometimes.

"You can have another glass, I like your feisty self when you're drunk," he says making sure nobody hears. I know where he's going with this.

I've been holding this wine glass in my hand looking at everyone in this room. The yard is quiet, the lights in the tent are off but the chairs and tables are still there.

When everybody left and our relatives went inside the house to sleep, the 13 of us went to the pool house, we don't know why but we all just ended up there.

It's funny how we're all laughing and joking and displaying so much love now in this same room where things were so tense Nkosana's gun had to be taken and hidden.

Xolie sits with her legs and feet on the couch with her head on Sambulo's shoulder, he has one arm around her, she's wearing his suit jacket. They're happy. Two months ago they were heading for divorce.

And there is Gugu and Nqoba, I always tell them they are on some mid-life crisis tip, they are wild.

And here we are, the conjoined twins of this family as Zandile would say, I'm sitting with my back on the corner of the couch and he's lying on the same couch on his back, with the back of his head on my chest, I have one arm around his chest and keeps rubbing my arm.

There is Qhawe and Naledi. We have to start planning for their wedding soon, but first her father has to come to terms with the fact that she's marrying a Zulu man, for now, he's hearing none of it.

The three single brothers are squashed on a three-seater couch.

The newly-weds are sitting together on a one-seater couch.

We've closed the sliding door just to avoid the noise from going all the way to the main house.

"I will never forget those threats by your mother, at one point I thought she was going to come and slap me," Nkosana says looking at me and laughing.

My mother held nothing back on that speech of hers. She sounded more like herself praying than a wedding speech.

"I'm still scared of her, after all these years I'm still scared of her," Mqoqi says.

They all are.

My mother still doesn't know what happened and why the wedding almost did not happen but judging by how she was threatening Nkosana with all kinds of bad luck and misfortunes if he does not treat his wife with respect, she assumes

he must have done something last night that made her really angry.

"She should have brought the aunt along, now that would have been a real turn-up," Mpande

They all laugh.

My aunt couldn't make it. This was the first family function I know that she did not attend.

"What are we going to do about Mbuba?" Xolie asks.

Silence.

What are we going to do about Mbuba? We were all supposed to have been there by now.

"Our airway was open for 8pm, it's 11pm now," Nqoba.

That's a problem.

We all look at Nkosana and Zandile, it's their traditional wedding, they put us in this mess.

"Mom says it's already buzzing with people in the yard, they're expecting a wedding tomorrow," Xolie.

Her mother stayed in Mbuba to make sure everything was ready for tomorrow.

We can't fly now, but we can't cancel the wedding because we are stuck in Joburg.

"We leave at 2am," Nkosana

"Whaaat? All four of us women say at almost the same time.

Driving to Mbuba at 2am? Is he serious? Does he not understand that we need our beauty sleep?

"Or, you ladies can stay behind and take the first flights to Durban, get a car at the airport and drive to Greytown," Mqoqi.

They all look at him funny, they're not gonna allow that.

The first flights are at about 7am, which means we'll be in Durban at 8am and arrive in Mbuba after 10am. It's not gonna work.

"That's not gonna work, 2am it is," I say.

We are too rich and too pretty to suffer like this, but what can we do? We married taxi drivers from Greytown, they drive across provinces in the wee hours of the morning with no problem at all.

I feel Mqhele's touch getting rather, well...intimate, he's not just brushing my arm now he's occasionally visiting the boob. It's time to go.

We stand up first and the others follow except Nkosana and Zandile, we have only three hours to sleep.

We all walk out but the two stay put. There was no talk at all about what happened today.

"Hlomu," Gugu says from behind me, pulling my arm.

I stop walking and stand with her just before where the stairs to the door start.

"I still don't know what happened. Why Zandile disappeared," she says.

She's always the last one to find things out, that's if she finds out.

"She found Mandisa's suicide letter last night, and read it,"

I say and run up the stairs where Mqhele is waiting for me at the top.



