

TERO BURU: FEATURE FILM SCRIPT



Silas Miami

Creative project in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of *Master of Arts* in Media Theory and Practice

Faculty of Humanities - Centre for Film and Media Studies

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Index

Introduction	1
QUEERING AFRICAN SCREENS – THE RESEARCH ARM OF ‘TERO BURU’	2
Background.....	3
<i>Significance.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Literature Review.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Methodology</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Limitations</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Findings</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Keywords</i>	
<i>Identity and Permission</i>	
<i>Culture and Ownership: Understanding the Inxeba Controversy</i>	
<i>Re-Defining Queer Work</i>	
<i>Conclusion</i>	<i>26</i>
MICHAEL AND I – A PERSONAL JOURNAL	31
MY GRANDMOTHER’S LIVING ROOM – A VISUAL CONCEPT JOURNAL.....	35
<i>Visual and Artistic Approach</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>Cinematography.....</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>Constume, Make-Up and Styling.....</i>	<i>36</i>
<i>Production Design</i>	<i>36</i>
<i>Sound and Music.....</i>	<i>37</i>
Appendix I: References.....	38
<i>Bibliography</i>	
Appendix II: Tero Buru - The Script.....	45

Introduction

‘Tero Buru’ is a creative writing project that locates itself at the intersection of critical academic research on perceptions of queerness in South African cinema and the filmic translation of personal queer lived experiences that is, ultimately, framed within cinematic praxis in Kenya.

A contained study that I conducted in 2018 sought to examine how African queer creative communities engage with backlash against not just the work they produce and exhibit but, by extension, in comprehension of past and current positionalities of African queerness, the very lives they lead. The research paper offers critical insights into why queer representation matters to young African queer creatives and explores the nature of the impact that contentious receptions of queer work has on their ability to produce and exhibit queer films in Africa.

Stories from my personal journals have been included in this project for the purpose of providing context that is both relevant to the research arm of the study and the resultant screenplay. They outline various motivations behind my examination of memory, imagined or otherwise, wherein queerness, and the defiance inherent to it, is freely documented. The journals detail conversations shared between my chosen family and I – ones that served as a starting point in the development of the screenplay.

The research paper finds its focus in South Africa as a function of the country’s unique position on the continent as one of the few nations where homosexuality is not criminalized. Because of this legal reality, data centered on queer representation is, comparatively, more accessible within the South African context. The screenplay, however, is set in Kenya – my home country. It was important that I locate the story in a setting that was familiar, if not entirely similar, to my lived experiences. In situating the research paper and screenplay side by side, parallels will emerge that suggest the existence of a somewhat culturally fragmented but tangible universality of shared experience held by queer African creatives.

QUEERING AFRICAN SCREENS

THE RESEARCH ARM OF TERO BURU

QUEERING AFRICAN SCREENS

“If you create films with gay people, you need to know that you will be disowned.

By your country, by your family, by the world. And you need to be okay with that.”

The conflict and controversy sparked by the production and public consumption of creative work wherein African queerness is liberally expressed is rarely explored from the perspective of the African queer creative. This paper examines how South African queer creatives interpret and understand the often-tumultuous reception that exhibitions of queerness in film and television receive from largely heterosexual South African audiences. With its focus trained on locating the labor concomitant to queer visibility, labor carried predominantly by members of the queer community, it interrogates the positioning of cinematic presentations of African queerness within South Africa’s past and current social and cultural landscape by examining how performative resistance of African queer narratives impact the Black queer creative community in South Africa.

Finally, this study critically explores the line of reasoning behind the displacement central to arguments that simultaneously seek to strip African queerness of any legitimate claim to ownership of indigenous African cultures and stories. Jon Trengrove’s film, *Inxeba (The Wound)* (2017), functions as this paper’s primary text. *Inxeba’s* conceptualisation, production, reception, and the controversy that succeeded its release will ultimately ground this paper’s examination of the consequential impact that its exhibition’s spectacle had on the lives, and production outputs, of Black African queer creatives.

Background

The significance of ethical representations of diverse voices in film and television has been passionately deliberated within numerous contemporary creative discourses (Peach, 2005). Historically marginalized persons in South Africa are demanding to see their specific lived experiences reflected in the cinema and television they consume (Eschholz, Bufkin, & Long, 2002). Narratives that feature thematics associated with African queerness in either film or television have largely been caricatures of *actual* queer lived experiences with many of them [narratives] falling short of meeting even the most basic expectations of materializing fully-realised queer characters (Botha, 2007).

The portrayal of disenfranchised groups in motion picture plays two crucial roles. First, it serves to affirm the humanities of those who seek to see themselves, and the people they love, represented and reflected back at them in a manner that makes them feel valued as they share in the sense of inclusion congenital to creative works (Mennel, 2012). Secondly, representative media functions as a vital resource in the essential effort of offering the wider public accessible civic education that promotes the visibility and affirmation of previously and currently ‘othered’ realities. This facilitating the foundation on which tolerance and acceptance is built (Livermon, 2012).

In 2017, the release of *Inxeba*, a South African film exploring manhood, sexuality and tradition in the context of Xhosa male initiation rituals, was met with sustained public contention and opposition upon its release; primarily as a result of its apparent disclosure of cultural rites deemed sacred and secret (Scott, 2017). The film, at its core, is understood to be an examination of cultural ownership and authenticity that boldly positions various characteristics of intensely visceral physical and emotional queer expression at the axis of its plot (Jali, 2018). It is a poignant exploration of homosexual actuality within a traditional and deeply cultural African framework (Ntsabo, 2017).

When the film was released into local theaters, having received immense acclaim from the international film festival circuit, pressure from conservative pockets of the South African public; led by organizations such as the Man and Boy Foundation and the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa; pushed South Africa’s Film and Publication Board to change its original 16LS rating to X18 (Masaba, 2018). This new classification, usually reserved for hard pornography, was incredibly restrictive to the film’s potential local reach and gravely impacted any commercial

prospects for a successful theatrical run (Venter 2018). The actor playing the lead role, queer performing artist Nakhane, and the films' queer black co-writers, Thando Mgqolozana and Malusi Bengu, were subject to sustained critique from fellow Xhosa men (and some women) for what they claimed was the ultimate epitomization of cultural vulturism: the commercialization and subsequent 'selling-off' of indigenous African cultures to the Western world (Jali, 2018; Scott, 2017).

A legal technicality employed in the appeal case logged by the film's creative team saw the film's rating revert to its original 16LS (Venter 2018). Many perceived the aggressive nature of the public opposition, disguised under the banner of cultural protection, as being dog-whistle homophobia: coded messaging of hatred towards queerness masked as a valiant and valid cry for cultural preservation (Friedlander, 2018; Pauwels, 2020). *Inxeba's* contentious reception exemplifies the deep violence faced by the African creative queer community. This violence is grounded in homophobia consequent of the rejection African Queer creatives meet whenever they employ their art to either document queer stories, engender queer representation in media or perform queer activism (Siswana and Kiguwa, 2018).

Framed primarily within a critical examination of public discourses precipitated by *Inxeba's* exhibition, this paper seeks to explore how Black queer filmmakers in South Africa perceive and comprehend the social contestation that directly relates to the queerness that is both fundamental to their existence and central to the important work they do of recording queer histories. The reality of queerness, in its presupposed natural positioning as being innately opposed to heteronormativity and homogeneity, challenges the inconsistency of widely-accepted but deeply fragmented societal norms (Pauwels, 2020).

This paper examines these perceptions in relation to the work and lived experiences of 11 queer creatives. The research elaborates not just why queer representation matters but also how it matters to Black queer creatives and reflects on the broader need for inclusion and acceptance of 'othered' identities (Reid, 2006). It explores how the interpretations of these 'gaps' of representations and controversies, fueled by the limited availability of accessible African queer texts, influences the nature and affirmity of creative output from the South African queer community.

Significance

At the time of writing this, out of the hundreds of locally produced films that had been released in Post-apartheid South Africa, less than 17 feature films that center around the story of a queer character have been produced (NFVF, 2020). When considered against the reported numbers from a 2016 study commissioned by The Other Foundation, an African Human Rights advocacy trust, that estimates the existence of over two million non-heteroconforming persons living in South Africa, the number of representative film releases is remarkably disproportionate (Sutherland et al, 2017). This suggests gross underrepresentation of queer lived experiences on South African cinema.

There is a need to develop a point of reference for Black queer creatives to understand the reception of queer stories in mainstream media (Msibi, 2012; Botha 2011). This can be achieved by contextualizing and affirming the validity of their own consternations through the recounting of stories and experiences detailing their engagement with dog-whistle homophobia (homophobia presenting as a genuine concern for the supposed preservation of Africa's acquired conservative 'moral' code) (Murray & Viljoen, 2007).

Representative civic education through film and television has played a vital role in propelling a shift in public perceptions of queerness by providing accessible points of reference for the public to begin engaging with and understanding sexual divergence that does not conform to heteronormativity (Botha, 2013). Internationally, many queer identifying people have credited globally syndicated American shows such as *'Will and Grace'* and *'Queer as Folk'* for actualizing their existence and legitimizing their humanity on platforms millions of viewers had access to (Cooper, 2003). In South Africa, the same can be said for individual queer personalities on television who have been accused of conforming to a specific, frequently stereotypical, model of what queerness should present as (Lwando, 2018).

It is important to note that at the time of writing this, there had been no mainstream television show that centered African queer experiences airing on local television anywhere on the continent: at least none that had amassed mainstream popularity (Pauwels, 2020). Films such as Jim Chuchu's *Stories of Our Lives* (2016) from Kenya, Oliver Hermanus' *Skoonheid* (2011) and *Moofie* (2019) from South Africa and important documentaries such as Johnny von Wallstroem *Pearl of Africa*

(2016) from Uganda have predominantly been celebrated in the International film festival circuit and have not achieved widespread viewership in their respective home countries.

Literature Review

In this study, the term 'Queer' is used primarily as an analytic concept in academic context (Livermon, 2012). In Marc Epprecht's earlier works, he postulates that 'queer' refers less to a sexual identity but as a way to think through how "non-normative [genders] and sexualities infiltrate dominant discourses to loosen their political [and cultural] stronghold." He later suggests that queerness functions as, "an anti-essentialist approach to researching gender and sexuality that is open to the whole range of human sexual diversity."

'Queer cinema' broadly describes films that are either made by queer persons, feature queer representations or find popularity (both positive and negative) within spheres of queer culture (Bob, 2010). Queer film theory is therefore the discourse consequent upon queer cinema. Subject to a queer theoretical approach, any film can be 'queered' in interpretation (Arron, 2004). The emergence of Queer Theory in Scholarly work is connected to the finite definitions of sexuality (gay, lesbian, transsexual, etc.) but, as a function of the term's existence in a constant state of flux. Botha points out that any claim made to justify a single 'gay identity' is false and that the term 'queer' as used in pedagogical discourse often relates to the experience of a very particular group of people: those with whom North American and European films often chose to represent (Botha 2014).

Part of the reason it is important to frame the argument within the context of 'queerness' as opposed to just gay and lesbian studies is the open-ended nature of the former. It problematizes certain questions associated with the more 'minoritized' theories of Gay and Lesbian studies (Botha, 2003; Reid 2006). In contrast, queer theory radically rejects easy binaries (heterosexuality vs homosexuality for instance) in favour of a universalized discourse (Cover, 2000). Diane highlights an example wherein the question of homosexuality's existence as a function of nature or nurture can be steered away from the space of causality and interrogated with the context of culture and ideologies (Dines, Humez, Yousman & Bindig, n.d.). By embracing the flexibility of the term queer, a re-appropriated word that was previously used to attack members of its

community, the arguments raised within discourse are insulated from hegemonic positions and what can be described as monocausal explanations of oppression.

A study of films representing queer narratives in Africa, Asia and Latin America concluded that queer cinema in South Africa, much like any other topical content produced regardless of focus, is exceedingly defined by its oppressive history (Botha 2003; 2012). Apartheid legislation dictated very particular stipulations in spatial distribution, human association, and of particular interest to my interrogation, sexual engagement. Queerness existed in direct conflict with ideals the Apartheid system tried to impose of various 'fixed' identities: race, class, ethnicity, gender etc (Botha and Van Aswegen, 1992).

Despite South Africa's current progressive constitution which provides blanket protections against discrimination along the lines of sexuality (a function of the new dispensation and a hard-fought battle forged by the queer community) (Magodyo, Andipatin, & Jackson, 2017), queer representation continues to exist within the margins of South African film and television. Peach puts it to us that while the rights of queer persons exist in South Africa's constitution, creative culture work from film and television was needed to have these rights tangibly enshrined and valued in public life (Peach, 2005).

Because queerness runs counter to the hegemonic heterosexual format the vast majority of South Africans ascribe to, it is unsurprisingly nearly invisible in the films made and distributed within the country (Botha, 2013). This is a norm mirrored in the depiction of queer persons in most Western countries: particularly in the United States where critical analysis and pedagogy around queer representation has been comprehensive (Russo, 1981). Hollywood's history with queer representation has been less than stellar. The Production Code, a censorship policy was institutionalized in the 1930's in response to the conservative mass' concerns over Hollywood's increasingly 'lascivious' films. When the filmmakers were seen to go soft on enforcing the policy, the Catholic church (America's moral mouthpiece at the time), threatened to enforce a boycott on 'objectionable' films. This erasure lasted decades, extending even beyond the eventual overturning of the policy. Russo details how homosexuality, which was considered 'sexual perversion' on a base level, fell under this censorship (Bronski et al., 2006).

In the USA, this production code didn't completely eradicate homosexual leanings in film. Filmmakers learned to subtly imbue gay subtext in their work, perhaps indicative of the realities of homosexual existence: code switching for the benefit of the heteronormative majority but never truly switching off. The code was ultimately abolished. In its place, a rating system was introduced that saw films with overt homosexual leanings granted the highest score: X. While there was no policy that could stop the making of gay films, gaining access to theatres to present the work would be nearly impossible (Russo, 1981). Decades later, in a completely different part of the world, the response to *Inxeba* reflects this application: against the basis of cultural precedence, the film was banned from general viewing and issued with the highest classification rating (Scott, 2017).

The research conducted on queer cinema in South African by the handful of queer scholars appears to be rooted largely within Afrikaans cinema (Jamal, 2005). In a paper exploring the bold temerities Oliver Hermanus' *Skoined* makes to expose the political hollowness of Afrikaner cinema, Grand Andrews explores how queer culture work has been denied the requisite scholarly attention it deserves (Andrews, 2018). At the time of writing this, less than 5 South African feature films centering Black queer narratives had been produced and theatrically released (NFVF, 2020). Discourse about why this Black queer erasure exists (and persists), even as the global popularity of queer culture continues to dominate mainstream art, music, and literature, operates within sociopolitical spheres of access and privilege that can be directly linked back to the apartheid regime (Gevisser and Cameron, 2014).

This cinematic erasure fails to reflect and celebrate the documented history of various queer, albeit secretive, fringe societies of color. In Cape Town, for instance, Colored queer persons formed the heart and living texture of District Six. It was there, in Woodstock and Salt River, that early drag culture developed (Botha 2013). Two Jack Lewis documentaries captured this world: '*Sando to Samantha AKA the Art of Dikvel*' (1998) and *A Normal Daughter: The Life and Times of Kewpie of District Six* (1997) – both reflective of Jennie Livingstone's queer culture cult-classic documentary, *Paris is Burning* (1990). In his book, *Marginal Lives and Painful Pasts: South African Cinema after Apartheid*, Botha attempts to go beyond the villainization of queer characters, the biased representation of lesbian attraction and the absence of overtly Black narratives in South African films by engaging in targeted analysis of a discursive list of queer narrative offerings (Sonnekus, 2013). Botha's extensive exploration of queer filmography spans

from Gevisser's award-winning documentary '*The Man who Drove with Mandela*' (1999) (about the flamboyant film director and ANC activist, Cecil Williams: the man who was 'chauffeur' the day Nelson Mandela was arrested) to Oliver Hermanus '*Skoonheid*'.

Livermon's enlightening article about the visibility of queerness in post-apartheid South Africa unpacks the reactions elicited by the controversy created by a gay couple calling into a famous radio show, '*Cheaters*', wherein disillusioned lovers call in to get help in verifying the fidelity of their partners. The show's popularity amongst the Black working class (a group that was particularly vocal about being scandalized by *Inxeba*'s subject matter) was of particular interest. The sensational segment kicked off a debate about the 'appropriateness of the increasing visibility of queer people and their relationships' (Livermon, 2012).

The late South African queer theorist and activist Mikki Van Zyl explores the obscurity of universality when trying to define identity and belonging (Livermon, 2012). Xavier frames her argument here by highlighting that while policy change in favor of offering queer people constitutional protection is a valuable first step, the larger conversation about the affording of freedom to queer people needs to expand into civic education (visibility) and the active dismantling of hegemonic heteronormativity. He references what theorist Judy Butler calls 'Livable lives' – facilitating the ability of Black queer individuals to create visibility through publicly 'performing' gender and sexuality dissidence without the threat of curtailment or death looming over them (Segal, 2008). He argues that ultimately visibility presents itself as self-resolving recognition that occurs variously: in text, in presence, in public proclamation and, of particular interest to my exploration, in acts of listening and watching (Livermon, 2012).

Matthias Pauwels' incredible paper, *Intersections of Queer Art and African Indigenous Culture: The Case of Inxeba (The Wound)*, offers a brilliant assessment of the deep violence faced by the African creative queer community's existence through their operative use of art as a function of activism. In it, Pauwels examines the cultural criticisms pointed at *Inxeba* from fascinating perspectives. He scrutinizes various arguments built on public concerns over breaches to presupposed cultural secrecy and the mystique proximate to traditional male circumcision (*ulwaluko*) within the Xhosa community. He then structures valid responses to the objections that many Black activists raised about the degree of accuracy to which cultural representation was exhibited in artistic representation. Pauwels explores the resulting multifocal and complicated

debates that emerged as a function of whiteness (Jon, the white director as an outsider) helming an overtly Black-themed story. He argues that this framing is deeply insulting to the creative team that was largely comprised of exceptional Black creatives including the screenplay's queer co-authors Thando Mgqolozana and Malusi Bengu. Pauwels does well to disarm homophobic criticisms that questioned external interest in indigenous cultures by framing the current reality of African Queerness as existing outside a deeply hypocritical culture of post-colonial acceptability.

He does, however, struggle to divorce his biases concerning legitimacy and ownership of stories belonging to historically disenfranchised communities by choosing to align his research with one-dimensional comprehensions of 'artivism' philosophies. He touts Rancière's idealistic beliefs that art, and artists as such, should be released from being required to hold intimate knowledge of the persons or cultures they make central to their work (Rancière, 2013). While I agree that art should be democratized, one cannot sidestep the power dynamics that must be located at the very core of representation discourse – not in Africa where the ghosts, past and present, of colonialism and apartheid continue to hang heavy over its people (Siswana and Kiguwa, 2018). Pauwels harmonizes with the need for ethical representation (in suspicious brevity for the overall dense nature of his piece), but still manages to craft a seemingly sound, but dangerous loophole in *Inxeba's* case that he lenses through concepts of 'outsiderism' (Gilroy, 1993). To this end, he draws interesting parallels to Jon Trengrove's own status as an outsider (a function of his queerness) and, similarly, the cultural exclusion Black queer persons suffer. These parallels, while fair and valid, will always fall in the absences of frames of power. Renowned queer activist Stacey Ann Chi holds that all oppression is connected. The degrees of impact, however, vary greatly (Cann, 2011).

The assembly of credible academic sources that meet the intention and focus of this paper provided a unique challenge. Inference of data collected through the observation of behavior or, in this paper's case, the comparing of contemporary, non-traditional references against the qualitative data collected from one-on-one interviews and carefully designed focus groups, is a powerful instrument that preserves the academic validity of social science research (Bollen, 2002). My analyses of many of the critical academic texts written about *Inxeba* have found that much of the research is focused on two main concentrations: an examination of gender-binary concepts such as 'masculinity' and sympathy towards the sensational aspects of the controversy sparked by the

film's release. Many of the texts fail to locate a clear understanding of the creative and social motivations held by the queer creatives behind the work and, subsequently, how the controversy sparked by the film's exhibition impacted this particular community. To counteract this subtle but sharp erasure, this research paper, while acknowledging the important contributions of key, albeit thematically and numerically limited scholarly works, stands clear of centering them in its primary discourse and instead opts to bend towards academically valid but non-traditional research sources that still maintain the theoretical integrity academic research demands.

Reading through many of the critical texts about *Inxeba* offered incredible insight into the kind of academic discourse the film engendered. This paper, however, commits to infusing its literature review with research that delves deeper than any loosely constructed analysis of the film's thematic content or the controversy that followed its release. Failure to honor a firm alignment to the specific focus of this paper: locating and interrogating the very unique experience of the African queer creative in relation to *Inxeba*, would only serve to diminish its research concentration. Pauwels, for instance, trains his analysis on the intentions of filmmakers behind *Inxeba* by interrogating the framing of the public criticism the (mostly) queer creatives received for allegedly misrepresenting and misappropriating indigenous Xhosa culture (Pauwels, 2020). This paper borrows from the kind of specificity existent in his analysis.

Part of the important research this paper stands on has been collected from various pockets of public engagements on social media and online news communities that may not have been subjected to the stringent vetting of traditional scholarship. These conversations are still valid and remain applicable in this analysis. The news sources carry commonly recognized journalistic credibility; as do the referenced articles from digital magazines and online communities. A great example of this is 'Queer Consciousness': an online magazine that offers deeply insightful access into African contemporary queerness through essays written predominantly by queer academics. Online spaces such as these offer varying and informative takes about *Inxeba*. One of the articles that stood out as a key reference for this research argues that opposition to *Inxeba* was primarily grounded in defense of perceived cultural appropriation and exploitation that framed a particular brand of homophobia (Scott, 2017). The article illustrates the kind of emotional labor queer persons expend in their fight against apparent 'moral' policing: a fight leveled against them by systemic and social bigotry. Dr. Lwando, the article's author, explores the ways in which energy

is demanded of African queer creatives as a function of self-preservation and the need to create insulation that cushions queer creatives from the inevitable pushback the queerness inherent to their work and existence will undoubtedly provoke.

Methodology

This study engaged qualitative research methods: employing a combination of interviews and focus groups (McConnell, 1998). Parts of this research included a study of social media reactions to the film *Inxeba*. The research employed a combination of two sampling methods: purposeful and convenience sampling. The latter was employed in context: I am a filmmaker, currently, operating within the creative industry. I will therefore use my access to reach the specified target market (Patton, 2002).

That being said, the primary criteria here being Black South African queer-identifying participants who operate within the African filmmaking industry.

The demographic profile of my research are as follows:

<u>Age:</u>	<u>Gender:</u>	<u>Sexuality:</u>	<u>Nationality:</u>	<u>Race:</u>
17-25	Male	Gay	South African	Black (African).

Although the LGBT and larger queer community have been bracketed together in the public sphere (the result of being united by the shared experience of discrimination along the lines of gender and sexuality), it is becoming increasingly important to exercise intersectionality when embarking on any exploration about its members (Bindle, 2016). It is dangerous to employ hierarchy when unpacking oppression: colloquially referred to as playing in the ‘Oppression Olympics’

(competition over which group of minorities have borne the greatest brunt of discrimination) (Bartosch, 2018). For example, although gay men and lesbians both experience homophobia, lesbians are doubly exposed to widespread sexism (Bindle, 2016): something gay men are unlikely to experience as a result of the existence of male privilege (disregarding performative masculinity) (Nast, 2002).

The decision to focus primarily on gay men for this study, beyond being a preference aligned to my own personal interests, was made in reference to the guiding text of the research: *Inxeba*. The film centers the story of a hidden gay romance between two men within a very particular cultural setting. The film's setting was, conversely, the main factor in deciding many of the specific factors that guided the creation of the research's demographics: factors such as nationality and race.

Access issues around discernable queerness and visibility (as dictated and defined by the participants themselves) aside, the project has been able to insulate its participants by successfully meeting several ethical requirements. These include, obtaining informed consent from the participants and defining the ethical boundaries of the proposed exploration (Saunders *et al.*, 2014). The study relies on a particular kind of reflectivity. Therefore, while the overall project offers certain assurances of anonymity, the identification of subjects for the study is contingent on the notion that its participants' have already relinquished some level of anonymity, specific to their sexual orientation (Dickson-Swift *et al.*, 2007).

I had initially opted to employ interviews as the only data collection method for this project, however, it became apparent that a combination of interviews and focus groups, in addition to examples extracted from social media, would help triangulate the results. This allowed me to test the validity of the results against both queer theory and the responses from both methods. This offered a more rounded research design and provided an extra layer of protection in the quest to anonymize the data collected (Michel, 2002).

The interviews provided a more natural form of interaction and facilitated intimacy (Flick, 1993). The results were rich, honest and comprehensive responses to the interview questions (Flick, 1993). In this study, Interviews were conducted where the creatives felt the safest. The sensitivity of the nature of the research topic: its grounding in personal experiences (and personal creative

work): necessitated the frontloading of authenticity. It was essential that I created a space where the interviewees felt they could share openly (Bazeley, 2009).

Through a series of semi-structured interviews, I proceeded to pose a set of standardized, highly targeted questions to participants of the study (after conducting a few pilot tests). I interviewed 5 participants. Due to the sensitive nature of the research, empathy remained key. I employed active listening techniques to create an atmosphere that fostered respect as the conversations developed emotional density.

On a personal note, seeing as the work bears intimate significance to me, it was important that I regularly reminded myself of my role as a facilitator to avoid a cross over into ‘participant’ territory: to engage just enough to acknowledge emotion, but leave enough distance to protect the integrity of the responses offered by the participants (Fontana & Frey, 1994).

Anonymization of qualitative material can prove to be particularly challenging as the researcher is working with sensitive human data (Hsu, 2018). While it is fairly easy to conceal basic information about one’s study subjects: names, addresses, specific ages: it is just as easy to piece together a person’s identity from deductive reasoning with just the knowledge of a few distinct elements from the subject’s life history: in-depth interviews, existing alone, could potentially provide the specific details that could reveal who a participant is (Bishop, 1994). The goal was to have the information about one person read as though it could potentially be referring to multiple people.

Focus groups allowed for data to be interpreted as intersubjective and broad comprehensions of seemingly shared experiences (Fontana & Frey, 1994). This fulfilled two crucial roles. Primarily, it allowed the researcher to interrogate and assess the extent of the operation of homogeneity, commonality and the boundaries of seemingly apparent individuality in respondents’ feedback (Michel, 2002). Secondly it allowed the data to be generalized for the purposes of anonymization (Saunders *et al*, 2014).

In the case of this particular study, the line of work engaged by the queer creatives was universally labeled under the banner ‘filmmaking’. This ensured that individuals could not be identified by their specializations or disciplines. Information not central to the findings of the study were redacted. These included explicit mention of the projects the participants had worked on. The

findings from the focus groups were then grouped with the findings from the in-depth interviews to limit predictability and identification (Bishop, 2005).

The focus groups were comprised of 6 or more participants; all members of the specified target demographic. These participants were different from those who were interviewed. They were all invited to watch *Inxeba* together. After which, the group embarked on a two-hour discussion loosely centered around visibility, queerness and representation as understood by each participant, under the guidance of semi-structured questions. I exhibited a few posts off of social media (either critical or supportive of the film) and presented them for the discussion. The questions were designed to encourage deeper responses.

Attention was paid to a few key points to ensure clarity and consistency in the collection of information. I made special note of quotes that highlighted important views and recurring themes that, subsequently, acted as guiding keywords in the coding process (McConnell, 1998). I additionally interrogated inconsistent or vague responses in the hopes of creating room for a deeper evaluation of the attitudes held under layers of respectability or inhibition (Bazeley, 2019).

The analysis of qualitative data comes a step after the collection and transcription of said sample-specific data from the interviews and focus groups. In order to explore the potentially large body of data that had been collected, I coded the data using Nvivo. This process consisted of coding using the participants own words: employing discourse analysis by interpreting the feedback from the interviews (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007).

I analyzed the semiotic meanings imbued into the language used – some of which could be described as being colloquial or specific to queer culture. The semiotics were defined by existing research done by queer theorists and scholars: these include works by experts on queer scholarship. While discourse analysis focused the data under specific concepts dictated by the recurring themes intrinsic in the information collected, using existing theory allowed me to compare and contrast to see what new information the study has yielded (Starks and Brown, 2007). Conversely the study lent itself to affirming already existing research.

Limitations

Identifying participants to engage in the research within the constraints of a limited timeframe emerged as the principal inhibiting factor in the execution of this project. I had access to only a handful of filmmakers who self-identifying as queer and operated in the Cape Town area. Many of them did not meet the criteria of the research's sampling parameters. For instance, potential participants were disqualified from participating because they were not 'fully out'; as in, they had not made their sexual and gender identities known publicly. It was important to respect each individuals' choice and their exposure comfort levels without hazarding the legitimacy of the research.

The issues of access challenged some of my previously held perceptions about how the local film industry operates. For years I had worked with the assumption that queer people were fairly well represented within the local film industry – and, from my surface deductions, they were. Most of the filmmakers I know in the city identify as queer. This group (queer filmmakers in Cape Town), however, is disproportionately white. I reached out to my contacts in and outside the city for leads over who to contact as potential interview subjects and was met with the apparent starkness of a thin list of Black queer filmmakers. Only after this futile search did I observe that, in hindsight, and in many of the productions I have worked on, I have been the only 'out' male queer person of color. Before this project, this disparity had not been made apparent to me.

Ultimately, I identified five queer men to interview, in addition to hosting a focus group with six other queer men and two queer women: all of whom self-identify as African filmmakers. The later addition of important voices from the lesbian community was inspired by two key factors. The first came as a result of engaging in casual conversations with queer women about the project leading up to the interviews. These conversations allowed me to see how the research could benefit from intersectional queer comparisons of gendered queer lived experiences. Secondly, and perhaps most surprisingly, locating publicly queer (self-identified) female filmmakers willing to participate in the research proved to be much easier than it was to locate their queer male counterparts.

Findings

If all oppression is connected (Chin, 2013), universality can therefore be found in stories that feature the lived experiences of disenfranchised groups (Harris, 2017). However, beyond shared trauma, very little unites the African queer creative community (Brown 2003). How they define themselves and the work they do is subject to relentless and often violent scrutiny. The right to exist in film and television as fully realized characters is a continuing battle. For the most part, queer people remain invisible on and, as this research project revealed, behind the screens, too.

The names of the participants in these findings have been changed.

Keywords

A few words kept recurring in the conversations. Among them were:

- **Self-preservation:** The need to protect oneself from the daily onslaught of discrimination and microaggressions in a space that asserts progress. The participants did, however, remain cognizant of the fact that ignoring the problems did not make them vanish.
- **Identity:** Questions of an existential nature surfaced numerous with no unanimous resolutions or clear answers. Many of the participants felt comfortable in who they identified as sexually. Others argued against being labeled.
- **Representation:** When prompted, the participants displayed a firm understanding of how they are represented on screen. There was uncertainty about how they could participate in the creation of representative content when the price of doing so and living in queer bodies is so high.
- **Tradition and Culture:** The participants understood that African culture and homosexuality could exist in tandem. Despite the controversy *Inxeba* stirred, many of the interviewees felt that it was unfair for them to choose.

- **White vs. Black:** The debate, much like everything in South Africa, is steeped in racial politics and understood through the lens of the country's difficult history.

Identity and Permission

“Representation gives us permission to exist. It means we matter. We’re seen.”

The search for identity for traditionally disenfranchised communities tends to locate itself within the representative media content they [minorities] choose to consume (Msibi, 2012). Thousands of South African films have been produced since 1911 when R.C.E Nissen wrote and directed the country's first feature film release, *‘The Great Kimberley Diamond Robbery’*. However, by 2019 only 19 South African films centering queer experiences had been widely released (NFVF, 2020). Whenever queer creatives assume the responsibility of documenting queerness in their work, its operation must be understood to subsist within an incongruent socio-political context wherein their existence (both inside of and independent from their artistic work) bears historic, current and continued marginalization and suppression (Tohlang, 2012). 9 out of the 11 participants in this study, when asked about the films they remembered watching in their formative years or later, and whether any of them had featured any memorable queer narratives; conceded to not having watched anything overtly queer in the cinemas.

Detox, a 27-year-old film director, revealed that had he had only begun searching for queer films when contemplating starting a career in filmmaking. The freedom he discovered in a university setting allowed him to engage with frank discourses around gender and identity. It was here, he remembers, that he was introduced to queer representation politics. His own personal struggles with his sexual identity intersected with his critical gender studies. This would eventually draw him towards queer cinema. While his academic practice facilitated his pedagogical explorations of queer cinema Detox had hoped to use queer film canon to quietly and privately learn about queer life. This hope was slowly watered as the stark absence of Black or African queer representation revealed itself to him. In his study of African cinema up to 2010, Botha, similarly, laments the marginal space queer cinema occupies in the larger framework of the country's film history. In 2013, when Botha published the findings of his study, there had been less than 10 feature films and just over 21 short films produced that centered a top-billed queer character. These films included Salmon de Jager's *‘Musiek vir die Agtergrond’*, Henk Pretorius' ; *Fanie Fourie's Lobola’*

and Donovan Marsh's '*Spud 2: The Madness Continues*': a film that epitomized how so many 'queer coded' films often relegate any consequential queer elements located within their narratives to the periphery of their core storyline. Unfortunately, at present, nearly a decade after Botha conducted his research, the number of diverse queer cinema offerings remains low. A report on South Africa's general box office conducted and released by South Africa's National Film and Video Foundation established that in the year 2019, 22 local productions (of the total 109 movies screened within the report's research period) obtained a local theatrical release. Of that, just a single film, Oliver Hermanus' second queer-centered feature *Moffie* (a derogatory Afrikaner word commonly applied as a gay slur), had centered a non-heteroromantic storyline.

Moffie, a remorseful adaptation of Andre Carl van der Merwe's semi-biographical novel by the same name, is a coming-of-age homoromantic traumata set against the backdrop of apartheid South Africa's military service (Hermanus, 2018). Of the 22 locally produced and theatrically released films in 2018, only two carried overtly queer storylines: Christiaan Olwagen's eccentric *Kanarie* and Etienne Kallos' intemperant *The Harvesters* (NFVF, 2020). Released to critical international acclaim, *The Harvesters*, a slow burning exploration of conservative Afrikaner farm life, attempts to study the toxicity inherent in performative masculinity and uninterrogated Afrikaner conservatism (Hoiij, 2018). The film's impressive cinematic translation does not, however, distract from the apparent resignation of its queer exploration to disproportionate subtlety. The homosexual elements inherent in the film are deeply underdeveloped and latent at best.

Similar to *Moffie*, *Kanarie*, although much brighter in tone, is set within the container of the South African white apartheid army. Chris Broodyk (2016) describes Afrikaans cinema, the source of much of South Africa's queer cinematic output, as a 'politically impotent' space – devoid of multifocal nuance and diversity. While some of Hermanus' work bucks this harsh critique by attempting to authentically deal with issues of race, gender and sexual violence through the problematization of accepted forms of Afrikaner masculinity, the texts have largely fail to expand beyond their white homogenous bounds (Devarenne, 2020). Therefore, it is accurate to hold that the coding present within the messages carried into South African Cinema suggest that queer visibility is either non-essential (as characterized by the limited offerings made by queer cinema to the greater weave-work of African cinema); trapped within a predominantly white apartheid

imagination (Jamal, 2005); or, in the case of a deeply culturally specific film such as *Inxeba*, the product of western neo-imperialism's attack on the preservation and protection of African culture (Xaso, Lwando et al, 2017). The essential work of representation that queer films undertake as a function of affirming queer existences beyond heteronormative and patriarchal influence or repression is disproportionately carried by a handful of films (Andrews, 2018). These films rarely seek to highlight queer communities of color. Following Msibi's definition of identity development for minorities being contingent on visibility, Black African queerness (contextualized within an African cinema) sits uncomfortably close to complete erasure (Zeeman, 2018).

Detox made a poignant remark about how his identity was shaped by the content he watched. With the sparsity of African queer representation, he found himself looking elsewhere for his 'tribe'. Detox's only exposure to anything queer in motion picture had been dubiously obtained gay pornography and western television shows such as David Kohan and Max Mutchnick's seminal queer sitcom '*Will and Grace*' (1998 - 2020). Detox argued, however, that shows like '*Will and Grace*' and Patrik-Ian Polk's short-lived but groundbreaking Black queer drama '*Noah's Arc*' had queer character's whose lived experiences he couldn't relate to. Katya (21), a screenwriter, concurred with Detox about the scarcity of queer films, much less ones relevant to African queer lived experiences. He would get his 'fix' from the few local shows that, he argued, had disjointed queer narratives. He gave an example of the popular South African soap '*Soul City*' (1994), that featured, what Katya described as, a peculiar lesbian storyline and the hugely publicized gay kiss between two Black characters: a South African television-first: on '*Yizo Yizo*' (2004).

Bianca (24), a production stylist, with whom I conducted a one-on-one interview, echoed the positions held by both Katya and Detox. Bianca felt that he couldn't identify with any of the queer characters he saw on television while growing up. They had always felt like caricatures of actual people:

"...they were the butt of the joke, the best friend with the sage advice or the fashion forward 'spicy' friend with vague and superficial opinions about astrology".

In a moment of introspection, Bianca shares that he could see how his current personality was shaped by what he interpreted as western versions of queerness. These were all he (and other queer men like Katya and Detox) had been exposed to on television in their formative years. He felt as though he had permission to exist because, "...his wrist was just as limp as Jack's (from '*Will and Grace*')." This permission however, only stretched as far as the larger-than-life two-dimensional depictions afforded by Jack's character.

Permission, as a feature of representation, also operates as a function of the environment queer children grow up in (Gibson, 2015). There is very little penetration of queer cinema into African homes (Botha, 2004). Therefore, for many of the participants, television shows and films that featured gay characters were not (knowingly) permitted into their fairly conservative homes. Detox recalled how he would have to sneak into a pay-per-hour cybercafé to find queer content on the internet. He painted a visual of a teenager hidden in the back of a dingy room full of computers: terrified of getting caught. Very often, in those cafes, older men with full knowledge of what he was doing would hit on him - even though he clearly presented as being underage. None of the participants I spoke to had liberal upbringings.

By the accounts of all the participants, queer content in the home would be met with aggressive resistance and fervent religious rebuke. I would argue that this rebuke [from parents and care givers] influences African queer identities by perpetuating fear and repression as a practice of self-preservation and survival (Gibson, 2015). By their own admittance, these themes have, at one time or another, defined how all 11 participants navigated their lives: fear and shame remained central to their engagement with queerness. Detox, Bianca and Katya's search to define their queer identity would eventually locate them within a labelled group: a label they, and 8 other participants would later come to reject:

When asked whether they would consider their work 'gay' (or queer), only 2 out of 11 said 'yes'. The remaining participants, in one way or another, rejected the label.

Culture and Ownership: Understanding the *Inxeba* Controversy

The 10 participants who'd watched *Inxeba* before the interviews found out about the film because of the controversy surrounding it: the participants in the focus group hesitated when encouraged to embark on discussion about it. Robust intersections exist between various forms of cultural

identities (e.g. religion, traditional folklore, assimilated tradition) that operate to justify and keep homophobia and discrimination firmly rooted in contemporary African culture (Msibi, 2012). Challenges to these intersections are often met with aggressive public opposition: *Inxeba* located itself at the intersection of queer sexuality, religion and African tradition (Scott, 2018). There have been unceasing attempts to de-center queerness from African culture and tradition (Vincent, 2008). Under the guise of religion and cultural preservation, queerness has been framed as being a deviation from the ‘norm’ (hegemonic heteronormativity) (Msibi, 2012). This continues to make it difficult for queer creatives to claim both their sexual and cultural identity.

“I understand why everyone was up in arms about it. It’s their culture. They’re trying to protect it. But they forget that it is also my culture.” - Nakhane.

6 participants had not watched the film before I approached them to take part in the project. Katya was one of them. When asked why he hadn’t watched it, he argued that the dispute around the cultural aspects of the film had kept him away: he admitted to having access to the work, but no motivation to watch it.

4 out of the 5 Xhosa participants felt the controversy was disingenuous. The initiation process is deeply spiritual and, rightfully, guarded and there was valid criticism levelled against the film. Jon Trengove (the director), a white man, was accused of appropriating Xhosa culture: despite the screenplay having been penned by Thando Mgqolozana and Malusi Bengu - two queer Xhosa men (Jali, 2018). The basis of this argument was framed around South Africa’s complicated colonial and racial history and raised questions about access, privilege and cultural ownership: just a few of the intersections that define African identities (Scott, 2018).

Pauwel argues that Johns identity as a queer man and his apparent willingness to make room for critique from Black activists (framed as if to suggest that this very basic concession was worthy of a medal) is a marker that carries equal weight to other important identity markers such as culture

or race. It is especially true now that gender and sexual expression are essential identity markers: queer persons who are shunned by their communities will often band together to form tribes and select new chosen families based primarily on the universality of queer displacement (Mbao, 2020). It is therefore not uncommon to find queer creatives telling each other's stories because shared trauma is employed within queer communities to affirm gender and sexual identity markers - even in cases where specific cultural contexts differ (Pauwel, 2020).

Pauwel contends that, in Jon's case, this positioning supersedes the expectations demanded of specific cultural and ethnic identity markers; demands that have been employed in arguments from Black critics of the film who questioned Jon's crucial role in *Inxeba* (Philile, 2018). I struggle with this argument because it does not factor in the dynamics of unethical power distribution and the devastating hit African cultural identities took as a function of historical and current injustices linked to imperialism. His arguments fail to locate the humanity and voice of Africans whose cultural identity markers were severely impacted by colonialism and forced religious assimilation. Pauwels argues against the impossibility of 'neat borders' (the irony of this unfortunate choice of words clearly lost on him) without locating the very evident reasons why many Africans feel the need to protect whatever version of their culture they have left.

A majority of the participants kept reverting to the separation of African culture and queerness: rather, they could not locate the intersection. I argue that this is because mutual inclusivity between the two has not been widely represented. The participants seemed to have stronger loyalties to cultural preservation of African tradition (as understood contemporarily) as opposed to their queerness. In the absence of an intersection, the reverence for African culture is greater than that of African queer culture: the former having been touted as the norm. I found a good example of this in the conversation that sprouted about the grounds for which the Xhosa community decried the film. The Xhosa men in the focus group initially maintained that *Inxeba* revealed certain sacred rituals that had tradition demanded remain secret for everyone except the men engaging in the initiation process. Trixie (25), a lesbian screenwriter and a Xhosa woman, did however argue that the film had not exposed what was already public knowledge - especially because Xhosa women are not made privy to many of the rituals conducted during and after the initiation process (Magodyo, Andipatin, & Jackson, 2017). When the men were challenged by Trixie and her knowledge of the process, they all conceded that the film largely shies away from parts of the

process that are sacred or linked to spirituality. In this regard, Trixie believed that it was the people who hadn't watched the film who fought the loudest because they could not see how Xhosa culture and homosexuality intersected.

Homosexuality is still largely believed to be a western phenomenon: a belief that has been numerous times disproved (Ntozini & Ngqangweni, 2016). There are many instances of openly queer men going through the initiation process: albeit subject to differences because of their 'safety' (code used to freely exercise discrimination). This revelation is in direct conflict to the arguments about the existence of openly gay people, recognized and respected by tradition, in Xhosa culture (Magodyo, Andipatin, & Jackson, 2017).

This erasure allows for the propagation of incredibly harmful behaviour (Ntozini & Ngqangweni, 2016). Katya admits to having sexual relations while in the bush: he was made to stay a month longer in the initiation school he was sent to because his father perceived him as being 'too feminine'. He later admitted to being sexually assaulted by one of the spiritual leaders under the pretence of helping him heal faster. Unfortunately, his story is not unique. Numerous accounts have emerged in recent years recounting the sexual abuse young men experience while in the bush (Vincent, 2008). The cloak of pretence and secrecy that shrouds homosexual existences, that promotes the 'removal' of queerness, facilitates the proliferation of horrific experiences like these (Ntozini & Ngqangweni, 2016).

The unwillingness to recognise and accept the existence of seemingly divergent sexual identities is less about cultural rigidity and more about misinformation (Msibi, 2012). Postcolonial legacies across Africa have borne witness to assimilated cultural practices: there are many African Christians who still practice traditional divinity (Graeme, 1996). Bianca's parents are some of them. While they go to church every Sunday religiously, so to speak, they still observe traditional Xhosa rituals. This proves that there is room for evolution around belief systems: predicated on the eradication of ignorance. It is important to note that as a function of cultural inhibition and conservatism, for many African parents, any issues of sexuality make for difficult conversation (Magodyo, Andipatin, & Jackson, 2017). But if queer people are to achieve equitable representation, it is vital that we engage in these conversations.

This excerpt from Pauwels' paper sits at odds with me:

“The almost exclusive focus of Black critics on Trengove as the film’s director seems designed for the purpose of presenting Inxeba as an outside attack on Xhosa culture, in an attempt at safeguarding its homogeneity and unity. This is quite insulting to the Black creators, producers and actors involved in the movie, whose presence is erased, their voices muted, and this, quite ironically, in the very name of defending their rights. A further irony is that such erasure of the contribution of Black people in cultural productions, with white creators getting all the credit, is a standard accusation of Black critics.”

Why Pauwel would choose to seemingly argue against the silencing of Black voices *whilst* simultaneously arguing for the silencing of *other* Black voices (rather condescendingly) defeats logic and insults the tenets of ethical academic discourse. This is an answer for anyone who had ever wondered what Christopher Nolan’s *Inception* would look like if it was about the erasure of African voices.

As a queer African man currently embroiled in the necessary labor of reconnecting with my lost history, I know what it means to have to choose between culture and gender as identity markers. I choose both. If taken with the sensitivity of located humanity and a fairly comprehensive understanding of African colonial occupation – one can locate the motivation behind multiple versions of this argument.

It is significant to note that while Jon’s name comes up frequently in Pauwels’ essay, the Black contributors he appears to speak for are, for the most part, almost never explicitly named.

Re-Defining Queer Work

In the oeuvre of South African cinema queer work as occupied very few slots: punitive legislation around homosexuality, low social capital and the unpredictability of the African film industry play roles in sustaining this limited representation (Botha, 2013). This may provide an answer to why queer people are less likely to classify their work as being ‘queer’. In adopting the label, one may feel that they immediately pit themselves against the other few offerings of queer film that have been allowed into mainstream viewership. When I raised this as a question, Detox expounded on

the point by suggesting that, by shunning the label, he felt as though his work could transverse the social and cultural bounds he knew existed. He felt he could link the potential for his success as a creative directly to how his sexual identity is publicly perceived.

Alaska (23), a film producer, mentioned that he felt himself turning into the stereotype: playing the role of the amusing queer person with a sound-bite for every occasion. His heterosexual; friends and family accepted him more easily when he played this role.

“Everyone was waiting for me to crack a joke...”

He felt as though other aspects of his life, besides his queerness, were not being captured or even recognized. Queerness, as dictated by western representations of it, became his identity and it came at a high price. Linked to the aspects of only being allowed to be one thing: performative awareness ‘wokeness’ (colloquial term to mean being overtly politically correct) is the role that many in the room felt they had to take on (Scott, 2018). Trixie argued that queer people have to be seen as hyper-critical of our own work to prove that they understand how rare the opportunity to be showcased is. To show gratitude. To show that they understand the ‘concerns’ of the heterosexual community even when they make a deliberate choice to ignore queer experiences.

The queer creatives I spoke to understand that they shoulder the unfortunate burden of having to ease heterosexual audiences into social acceptance and normalization of LGBTIQ+ existences will simultaneously re-defining what African queerness is in the work they produce.

Conclusion

When Katya first floated the idea of making a queer film, he turned to one of his close friends, Chacki (25), for advice. Chacki has made a name for herself as a pioneering director whose work is overtly queer. Her films have received international acclaim, earning her the label nearly everyone in the room was afraid of: the ‘queer filmmaker’. Before this project, I had spoken to Chacki about how she locates her work: how she is viewed by the international film world to whom she remains a darling. Her responses were incredibly self-aware. She believes that the international

film circuits love her brand because African queerness has been synonymous with trauma. Just as well: her work focuses on the discrimination and brutality of homophobia on the continent. African Queer Trauma is marketable in international spaces (Scott, 2018). Queer African films such as Jim Chuchu's *Stories of Our Lives* (2016) and Wanuri Kahiu's *Rafiki* (2018) have all achieved success in international festival circuits. They all center some kind of trauma levelled against queer persons.

When Katya asked Chacki what it would take for him to make a successful film about gay people, this was her response:

“If you create films with gay people, you need to know that you will be disowned.

By your country, by your family, by the world. And you need to be okay with that.”

Chacki continues to be shunned and attacked by her own people – both from within her familial spaces and in the public sphere. For ‘selling out’, ‘abandoning tradition’ and for being publicly queer, she has been ridiculed and shamed. And while she maintains that she has a strong support system (a ‘chosen family’) and that she loves what she does, she is open about the hurt her attackers cause whenever she presents new work.

That, ultimately, is the price that queer creatives pay for of making queer art.

But resistance is the backbone of queerness (McConnaughy, 2017). Everyone I interviewed had a dossier of stories detailing the fights they’ve engaged in to defend their right to exist – fights that continue today. They understand the responsibility that rests on their shoulders to create and amplify queer stories even if some of them hesitate to commit to the task.

Currently, the quantifier for the queer experience in African film is shared trauma (Winfrey, 2017). Queer people want and deserve to see queer characters in film and television who model and communicate dynamic and complex existences: aspirational characters who occupy a space that isn’t just tragic. Characters who are respected, cherished, and aren’t punished for loving.

There needs to be regard for positionality: Black queer creatives are writing from a place of truth: their truth. Their culture and their queerness are not mutually exclusive (Ntozini & Ngqangweni, 2016). *Inxeba* exemplified how deeply moving multidimensional stories about queer people can be produced within African cultural settings: it also proves that these two identity markers, queerness and culture, can intersect. This project has been instructive in highlighting that queer creatives are learning to cut through the noise: to disregard arguments that would seek to contort the debate around cultural ownership and appropriation into concluding that queer people cannot be custodians of African tradition and folklore.

Sometimes queer creatives feel the need to take a break from it all. The creatives collectively identified as exhausted. 9 out of 11 maintained that they would often find themselves on the forefront of resistance movements in the fight for socioeconomic parity (all oppression is connected). The rejection of queer labels by African queer creatives highlights some limitations of how queer theory has been defined. It does not factor in the unique psychological and cultural intersections that African Queer filmmakers are confronted by. Ownership of the label ‘Queer Work’ is difficult to assume for many African queer filmmakers. It encourages them to hold out their past and current trauma to gain legitimacy. It pushes them to make difficult decisions about how to negotiate their antagonizing culture: to constantly prove that they deserve to take ownership of their own culture.

“I have no problem being the Black angry person: but the doors it opens are emotionally draining.”

However, they are cognizant of the fact that the problems do not disappear in their search for reprieve. There is a need to build resilience – but the process can prove to be difficult and painful. Self-preservation provides a semblance of control over their lives: whether or not it’s an illusion (Butler, 2013). But the men and women I spoke to are simultaneously motivated by and are deeply terrified of the sacrifices they have to make so to improve the situation for the next generation of

African queers: sacrifices that the generations of queer people before them made so they could be that much more free.

In locating myself within the findings, as a queer African creative, I begin to feel a sense of community that I had not known I needed. This community is made up of people who will doubtlessly end up forfeiting any semblance of a 'traditional' life to tell difficult but important stories: to tell their stories. Representation in front of the camera cannot change until there's representation behind the camera: access to both spaces is still limited for queer people. Queer creatives understand the social and cultural restrictions governing work that is either theirs or about them – and they continue to work past those restrictions with courage and strength.

Someday, soon, queer people will get to tell their own stories without having to fall on a sword.

But until then: ***“Give me my truth or give me death.”***

tero
buru

MICHAEL AND I
A PERSONAL JOURNAL

WHO WE ARE

“Why do we only date white men?” Michael asked casually.

It was New Year’s Eve. He and I were sat on the beach loosely holding onto our G & T’s: that were more gin than tonic: taking in the humid air and staring into the endless darkness of the Indian Ocean. Our lives were nothing like we had imagined them to be. We had just had our annual DMC (Deep Meaningful Conversation): the colloquial equivalent of a queer friendship’s Annual General Meeting. An assessment of what we had achieved that year had been registered, and resolutions to do more the following year, declared. About seven years prior to this, almost to the date, he and I had met right there at the coast. We were both in school, competing at the National level in a creative category in the Kenya National Drama Festival. We had been sent to really crappy high schools for reasons neither one of us truly understood. I suppose both our mothers were hoping ‘tough’ schools would harden us. To their credit, Michael and I found ways to survive. Volumes will be written about this friendship - I am certain of this. There is nothing Michael and I have set out to achieve that we have not already. But perhaps our greatest accomplishment so far has been sustaining relationships with our tough mothers and absent fathers whilst being queer - out and proud. As Warsan Shire put it, we’ve both taught our parents how to give birth to us.

He and I may share hairstyles (as a function of rebellion against gender constructs), and a mutual appreciation for disrupting hegemonic masculinity, but he and I are just as different in countless ways: ones that ultimately make us more interesting to each other: he backpacks through Asia for fun; I book business class tickets on long layovers to gain access to airport lounges. He is a vegan while I have an unhealthy relationship with fried chicken. His family is his world but the only family I am interested in is the First Family on my favorite American television show - Scandal. Our differences and shared interests exist in a peculiar equilibrium that continues to baffle me.

“Why do we only date white men?” I sank my feet into the sand: silent.

Part of the reason I believe our friendship persists despite the distance and accelerated growth we're both experiencing in different parts of the world, is how we approach relationships: we had no manual, so we created one. Unfortunately, the base of the guide has been curated under the biased glance of whiteness and American gay culture. Locating our sexuality within a generally understood African context has always been an exercise in futility. This is confounded by the arguments contemporary and urban Black Africans find themselves sucked into regarding African authenticity: are we African enough, and what is the standard? Michael and I had long accepted our 'assimilation' status. Growing up, there were no African gay role models on our screens.

"Black men scare us," I eventually croaked out.

"Maybe. Except Major. But I can't date him for obvious reasons."

We laughed. We probably shouldn't have. He was talking about dating his dead grandfather. But we laughed. I could tell that he missed him. Major was the only person Michael truly loved. It had been a year since his passing, and I had held his hand through it but I wouldn't carry the pain for him. Because nobody gives you a manual to deal with the loss of the only man, the only family member, who truly loved you. How does drawing a line between western representation and local representation reveal gaps and how is this work going to make us understand this?

While I appreciate that there have been releases of great intersectional media content, representing all kinds of African men in various states of emotional undress, the works simply haven't achieved mainstream appeal. And what good is text without an audience or readership?

What good is a show that our fathers will never watch? A show that might have helped them understand their sons better? So, in line with the approach I take with many of the situations that trouble me, I chose to engage with the stories of our lives we never get to see from others: to write a film that would be an amalgam Kenyan queer experiences, framed within my life events and my emotional rejoinders.

When the ruling came in, affirming a colonial-era law that criminalized homosexuality, I was hit by a wave of sadness that carried a swiftness so great it ignored every inclination I had to resolve to my cynicism for safety. I was deeply embarrassed that I had allowed myself to expect more

from a judicial system that practically advertises its broken parts with little to no shame: that I had allowed myself to hope. Still, the waves were promptly followed by airs of helplessness and eventually, white hot rage. That day was not going to be the day I was erased.

I want 'Tero Buru' to act as stone that builds a fortress for the next generation of queer Africans to seek shelter under - away from a world hell bent on convincing them that being different is a crime. This is the sword I put on the table as the queer community in Kenya take stock of its arsenal in the fight for equality and equity. A story. One that screams, "Gay people exist!" They live wonderful, multidimensional and complex lives. African queerness is no longer interested in debating its existence and its humanity.

Miles isn't either.

tero
buru

MY GRANDMOTHER'S LIVING ROOM
A VISUAL CONCEPT JOURNAL

Visual and Artistic Approach

The cinematic translation is a living, breathing being that remains dynamic as I continue to do my research: the film's visual treatment is still evolving. Over the past five years, as a function of my time in academia, I have been lucky enough to have received training as a director in the conventional sense. However, while film studies has its benefits, I believe *Tero Buru* demands more. It calls us to take a deeper look at the role cinema has played in preserving African stories. In many ways, it demands its own path. To that end, I am guided by three fundamental pillars that hold up the film's entire visual language.

1. The development/celebration of an African film aesthetic.
2. Orality as translated in the medium of film.
3. The intersection of tradition and modernity.

To tell this story through Miles' eyes, pivoted against my own experiences and the those of the queer people in my chosen family, is proving to be a deeply spiritual experience.

Cinematography

We see the entire world through Miles's perspective. Although the transitions between the time periods demand clear cinematic distinctions, our treatment of the camera and how it captures the world is not yet complete. If anything, I am more certain of the elements I don't intend to employ than I am of those that I do. I have found that this has helped me triangulate how I'd like to capture the world. For instance, I know we do not want to employ a 'documentary-style' visual translation: handheld shots will be used on a 'need to' basis; as it stands, I am yet to need it. That leaves us to think about how we could go about stabilizing the picture without losing the naturalistic approach we are going for.

That being said, I am certain that I would like to capture the glorious golden glow of Kisumu's light, the humidity and heat reflecting off of Black and brown skin and the wondrous night sky Maseno unwraps when the sun goes down.

Costume, Make-Up and Styling

The progression of character can be seen briefly through the explication of three important aesthetic aspects: texture, color and structure. Luo Traditional garb is colorful and expressive. Unlike other parts of the world where funeral drab is often underscored by muted colors and understated fabrics, Luo funerals lend themselves to bursts of colors. These colors are specific to the wishes of the 'planning committee' tasked with dictating uniformity during the ceremony. Matching fabric in the chosen colors present a strangely striking background for the somber event.

The religious factions refuse to be outdone. They put their own spin to funeral costuming: the women are swathed in matching headwraps and religious gowns, the men squeeze into the suits their wives had made for them and the children run around in 'bata rubbers' and matching t-shirts with the image of the deceased stenciled onto them.

Production Design

The story unfolds entirely in a container: Major and Dani's house in Maseno, Kenya. Operating between the two timelines (2005 and 2019) will be exciting to navigate. Much of the house is different but, in some ways, it looks the same. The colors on the wall are the softest peach. The living room is wall-to-wall velvet, wood and nostalgia. Major and Dani's wedding china, the kind they only let out for special occasions, is packed inside an ornate old mahogany wall unit that divides the living room and dining area. Crisp white crocheted seat covers are carefully tucked into the edges of the maroon seats. Table protectors made from only vinyl material dangle off the edge of the sturdy dining room table. Photos of Miles' entire family line the walls. They compete for space with imagery of Jesus, outdated calendars and prayer-hand clocks with bible quotes etched into them.

I see the space as clear as day. The stables with his favorite cows: the kennel Major built with Miles for his old dogs: the rusty water tanker at the back of the house near the servant's quarters; the sooty outside kitchen; the cement block near the gate where his old satellite dish still stands (he was the first man in the village to get one). I am excited to recreate a version of this house and bring the story to life in it.

Sound and Music

Luo funerals are a cacophony of sounds – from the voluminous wails from the mourners, the loud cackling from parties, and the shouting as a form of respect, to the loud singing of Catholic dirges. The balance between dialogue and the dissonance of sounds poses a thrilling challenge for us. The conventions of the comedic genre will more than likely dictate how the sounds in the world dance around each other.

I would love to hold a space for exclusively African music, but when I think about my grandfather's house, I still hear the 6pm beep on the radio signaling the start of his favorite show: 'Sundowner' - hosted by the buttery voiced Okwach Ojwang'. They'd play an eclectic mix of his favorite classic pop tunes. Everything from Barry White to Kenny G. The show is still running today. And though its popularity has waned, when my eyes are shut and I'm transported to the world of the story, I can hear the music streaming through the old Toshiba speakers in the kitchen. I imagine a young Miles running through the house as Luther Vandross serenades the women and men in the kitchen chopping up bucketsful of food. I can hear the elders jiving to the Nyatiti (a traditional Luo musical instrument) as they dance around the fire. The younger crowd will be listening to Kenyan pop music in their tents - drinking what I can only describe as jet-fuel as a function of peer pressure.

The fusion will be glorious.

tero
buru

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(APPENDIX 1))

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tero
buru

THE SCRIPT

(Appendix 2)

tero buru

TERO BURU A ritual performance (reserved only for men) by mourners that is believed to escort the deceased into the afterlife by accompanying the spirit to the former battleground. The ritual imitates a time when forefathers engaged in inter-clan wars.

The slaughter of animals is followed by a large procession leading from the property boundary lines to the deceased's homestead as women and children join in the wailing.

teroburu



Genre:

Dark Comedy

Duration:

90”

Tero Buru

Logline

Amongst the lurid mourners melting in the sweltering Kisumu heat, Miles, a columnist and a chronic people-pleaser, avoids the rejection he believes is buried in the final entries of his late grandfather’s journals.

Synopsis

Tero Buru follows Miles, an emotionally generous young man with the dress sense of a stray mammal, when he is sucked into the hot stagnant Kisumu air where a convenient version of eccentric Luo traditions mark the final two days of his grandfather’s funeral. Miles rejects his grandmother’s attempts to give him the journals that belonged to Major, his grandfather - Miles’ only sympathetic father figure. Instead, he overextends himself by taking on the role of being everyone’s fixer.

Miles proves to be exceptional at navigating bull stampedes and relatives with sticky fingers who, when caught, swear that the deceased would have wanted them to have the underwear they pinched from the master bedroom. When his childhood abuser and his homophobic father arrive to pay their respects, the cracks in his carefully crafted veneer begin to show. His real anxieties erupt in a glorious blaze, fanned by the clashing of the various cliques at the party: the Nairobi cousins -- who bring their own bottled water to family events; the loud aunties -- who grill him about marriage; the fa-aaabulous gays -- who insist on living loud and unapologetically; and the hired mourners -- whose burdened screams and wails can only be matched by their ferocious appetites.

It is only when his grandfather is finally laid to rest that Miles truly feels the gulf Major has left in his life. He admits to his best friend that he came out to his grandfather a week before his death but was met with cold silence – hence his apprehension to read the journals. He can’t avoid it any longer. In the quiet of his grandfather’s study, Miles opens the journals. Major had left him a message after all. A request: that Miles, in his endeavour to be everything to everyone, learn how love himself at least as much as he loves those he cherishes.

TERO BURU

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INT. MASENO HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

MILES (28, tall, endearing and anal) powers through his grandmother's kitchen with sunken eyes, a visible slouch and a decisive gait. He carries an old and fraying woven basket full of chopped wood. He plunks it down by the sink and kneads his soft palms - one over the other - his skin glowing in the deepest shade of dry brown. He moves further into the kitchen, tossing a mint into his mouth which he quickly crushes. He looks up at where the wallpaper peels off from the ceiling. Steam and smoke billow up and nestle themselves in the sooty crown molding.

The room is abuzz with aproned WOMEN milling around, shouting over each other, as they prepare the mounds of food covering most of the surfaces. Steam, smoke, slice, sizzle, spice. His nervous cousin, ALEX (16, impressionable, soft spoken and perpetually eating) follows close behind, peeled carrot in hand, scribbling into a tattered notebook, nearly tripping over himself.

MILES

Let's get twenty plates out to the green table. Did they find table runners?

ALEX

Yes, but Victoria said they were ugly so she's sent for new ones--

MILES

Did she give her card again?

Alex nods, 'yes'. Miles restrains a sigh.

MILES (CONT'D)

Ask Jemima about the wreath... again.

ALEX

I think your father grabbed those yesterday.

Miles stops and looks out into the courtyard, rolling his right shoulder - clearly uncomfortable in his navy suit. Hundreds of mourners, dressed in different shades of dark, but contextually unusual colorful print, console each other in-between bites of food being passed around by younger children. He loosens his tie.

MILES

He didn't. Find Jemima.

ALEX

She's helping Polo with the eulogy.

VICTORIA (27, carefree, impulsive, stunning, Miles' distant cousin and former lover) walks through the door, juggling paperwork, a clipboard and two cellphones. She has one air pod in her right ear, the other in hand and a fanny pack buckled across her chest.

VICTORIA

He's still doing that?

(into headset)

Tell him we asked for 7 tents. 7.

Miles realizes that she's on the phone. They stand there and look at her.

MILES

Are you going to tell him he can't?

VICTORIA

Boss, I'm staring at the requisition form right here so I don't know what you're talking about. Listen friend, tell them to come pick up the extra ones or we're going to use them. Either way, I'm only paying for 7...

(to Miles and Alex)

Where is he?

MILES

You are absolutely not talking to Polo. With your no-empathy-having ass.

VICTORIA

Empathy I can find. Patience?

Different story.

(into headset)

Listen my friend, call me back when you know what you're doing.

She hangs up.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)

Which, at this rate, will be my own funeral.

Some of the women look at Victoria in horror. She smiles at them. They sneer.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)
Just tell him he can't do it. Or at
least let me film it.

MILES
You're cruel.

VICTORIA
I'm...being called.

She taps her lone air pod and turns away to speak into it.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)
Yello?

She turns back suddenly.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)
Nope.

Victoria takes the air pod out and hands Alex the entire load
of paperwork. He looks completely flustered. Miles is amused.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)
The tent guy. Fix it.

ALEX
Uhm, Okay...what should I--

VICTORIA
You've got this.

Victoria, with a friendly pat on Alex's back, walks past him
to the counter full of chopped vegetables. Alex struggles to
get the air pod into his ear

ALEX
Yes, this is Alex. A-lex--

Alex quickly swivels back around.

ALEX (CONT'D)
I was told to give you this.

He hands Miles a large comb.

VICTORIA
Who by?

ALEX
Uhm...I can't remember.

MILES
So you're conspiring against me
with the aunties?

Victoria moves to say something sharp but Alex, sensing danger, abruptly turns his attention to the phone.

ALEX
Yes, hello? I'm still here, yes.

Alex waddles off into the house.

MILES
He's scared of you.

VICTORIA
With good reason, I imagine.

MILES
About the tents. Please keep the
receipts--

Victoria winks and snaps her fingers like a railway station turn-stop.

VICTORIA
I always keep receipts.

Miles feigns confusion and waves his hand in repeated circles in Victoria's direction.

MILES
Would you like to unpack whatever
that was?

VICTORIA
That was me. Feeling my oats.

MILES
Did the oats consent to it?

Victoria grabs a carrot off the counter and gives one of the ladies chopping food a lazy hi-five.

MILES (CONT'D)
Seriously though. We'll need to pay
you back--

VICTORIA
First of all, those tents are ugly.

MILES

I think it's best that we agree to
abandon any expectations of
passable aesthetics this weekend.

VICTORIA

Suspend? Maybe. Abandon altogether?
No, thank you. Also, who is 'we'?

LO (35, Trans, fiery, Major and Dani's House Manager) walks
in carrying a bundle of firewood that she drops by the basket
Miles walked in with. Her bundle is considerably smaller than
Miles'. She playfully scoffs.

LO

If you keep making me look bad,
I'll kick you out of my kitchen.

MILES

(To Victoria)

Please talk to your friend and tell
her to accept help

VICTORIA

Oh, so you can help out, but I
can't buy tents without being
subjected to an interrogation--

MILES

Did you buy them? We agreed just
renting--

VICTORIA

Who's 'we'? Also, relax.

Victoria scans over the room with her hand.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)

Look at how this family eats?
There'll be more funerals. I
promise.

Victoria takes the lid off of a large pot. Steam rises and
rumbles of the boiling food fill the kitchen.

MILES

Oh, so this is an investment?

VICTORIA

Essentially. Lo, which one?

With her striking chin, Lo points at another large pot in the
corner of the kitchen.

LO

That one.

Victoria swivels around and makes a beeline for it, large spoon in hand. Victoria scoops out the meat from the sufuria and gently blows on it to cool it down. She savors her bite.

VICTORIA

Okay, Mama your entire back is in here. Just clap for yourself.

LO

Tender, right?

MILES

Munyu?

Victoria offers Miles a bite. He shakes his head, 'no'. Lo lifts up a half empty 5-liter bottle with brown liquid in it from under the counter.

LO

I made extra if you want to take some home with--

Smoke begins to billow out of one of the large pots being manned by MARIA (35, unintentionally obtuse).

LO (CONT'D)

Maria if those onions burn...

VICTORIA

Lo, the flavor? Yes.
(to Miles)
Here, just try it.

MILES

This is a personal vendetta against my waistline.

VICTORIA

You skinnies are annoying. Eat.

He backs away from the door and reaches for the ladle in Victoria's hand. Maria is struggling to stir the onions. They brown quickly. Smoke continue to waft out of the large pan. Lo watches her - frustrated.

LO

Water, Maria, Water--

Maria drops the wooden spoon, grabs and empty jug and runs out, struggling to tighten the falling leso around her hips.

Lo grabs her cup of water and pours its contents into the large sufuria.

LO (CONT'D)

Maggie I swear if you let that woman near the food again, your children will be barren.

It roars into a loud sizzle. Victoria laughs. Miles cocks his head. He can hear something.

MILES

Do you...

VICTORIA

Woi, she's just trying to help.

Miles checks his watch, then his phone. He looks at Victoria who catches his gaze. She can hear it too: indistinct sounds from outside.

LO

This is the third batch of onions she's burnt. Third...

Everything in the kitchen stops. All anyone can hear is the sizzle, crackle and distant wailing. The women in the kitchen are suddenly wailing too - loudly. None of them leaving their posts.

MILES

Shit.

VICTORIA

Shit.

Miles' breathing intensifies. His nerves wear themselves on his expression. He fixes his tie. Victoria suddenly grabs him and hugs him. They whisper to each other in the embrace.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)

A kitchen fire?

Miles stays quiet for a while. He stares at the wailing women: almost fascinated by their ability to multitask.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)

C'mon. A kitchen fire.

Miles clears his throat, bringing his attention back to the hug.

MILES

Okay. Uhm...It combines two of your favorite things.

VICTORIA

Food and fires.

MILES (CONT'D)

Food and fires.

Miles tries to stay present.

MILES (CONT'D)

The pain, though. It'll be excruciating.

VICTORIA

Not if my nerves on my skin are shot first.

Silence holds in the space between them. Miles stares blackly at a crackling fire engulfing a clay pot.

MILES

That's a myth. Also, there's no chance of an open casket.

Victoria tightens her grip.

MILES(O.S.) (CONT'D)

And you want an open casket.

VICTORIA

I want an open casket.

Miles gently pushes himself off of Victoria just far enough that they are face-to-face.

MILES (CONT'D)

Did Alex get you those Blues?

VICTORIA

Are you sure?

MILES

Vicky...

Victoria quickly scrounges in her fanny pack. She whips out a pack of Marlboro blues.

VICTORIA

Anyiko has my lighter--

Miles grabs a single stick from her pack and powers out. He almost bumps into Maria. He picks up a flaming stick from one of the *jikos* and lights it as he steps out onto:

EXT. MASENO HOUSE - KITCHEN BACK PORCH - DAY

Miles drops the stick. The smoldering end breaks off into smaller pieces that spark on impact. He steps over them and settles at the edge of the staircase. Victoria comes up behind him.

VICTORIA

What if I'm not married by then?
They're going to want to put me in
a stretch-fabric wedding dress.

MILES

Never. I won't let them.

Miles kneads his shoulder with his free hand.

MILES (CONT'D)

It'll be polyester.

VICTORIA

That's - that's low. Then no dress.
I'll take nude scandal over pearly
white anything.

The distant wailing, chanting and singing grows louder. Miles takes a long drag of the cigarette.

MILES

The church ladies will want to
prepare you for marriage.

VICTORIA

To whom?

MILES

Jesus.

VICTORIA

In polyester?

MILES

You could ask his dad to whip
something up?

VICTORIA

The guy created heterosexuals and
thought that was okay. I question
his taste levels.

He takes another drag. His hands shake with each inhale. The noise grows louder. They remain silent. She places her hand on his shoulder and squeezes. The air trapped in his lungs release.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)

You're okay.

Ash from the cigarette snows his shoes. He shakes it off, takes a few breaths and flicks the rest of the cigarette into a puddle of water.

MILES

I promise I won't bury you in polyester.

VICTORIA

I promise not to haunt you if they make you.

His hand glides up his suit to meet Victoria's. The sounds of wailing, chanting and crying vibrate across them.

INT. MASENO HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Miles powers through the kitchen and makes his way to the living room.

LO

Maria, let those onions burn again.
Jaribu. Untaniona. I'll give you something to really cry about--

Victoria follows behind him into:

EXT. MASENO HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

A large male bovine rampages across the living room. Behind it are five men carrying freshly cut tree branches screaming at the top of their lungs. The bull nearly runs Miles down. He jumps back, the Bull's horn narrowly missing his face.

MILES

Jesus, Fu-

TITLE CARD: TERO
BURU

VICTORIA

I've got this. Go go. Go.

Victoria nudges him off and hangs back with the Bull. The men run out with Miles. Victoria and the bull face-off.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)

I'm just going to--

The Bull blocks all her attempts to push past him.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)
No? Okay. I respect that.

EXT. MASENO HOUSE - VERANDAH - DAY

Miles wades through a chaotic assembly of loud mourners, raging cattle and suffocating body odor. He dodges several piles made up of animated women who've flung themselves onto the ground. He ducks to avoid being hit by large tree branches being whisked in the air by crying men. Children, present as a function of amusement more than anything else, block his way.

CHILD 1
Wacha kuni-sukuma!

He slides past them and stops by the large gate framing the edges of the 'inner-compound's' fencing. He waits there, watching the long procession of dusty cars arrive.

CHILD 2
Unani-block!

Children climb up onto falling tree branches, water tanks, parts of the perimeter wall and the sections of the gate that haven't began to rust - all hoping to get a better vantage point to witness the insanity. The sirens and honking are deafening. Mile's Great Uncle, politician-cum-pastor, ANYANG' (52, serpentine, oily and physically disproportionate) violently pushes people out of the way.

WAILING WOMAN
Ameenda!

ANYANG'
Songa! Tokeni!

Miles makes for the cars as they slowly grind to a stop - seemingly unable to move any further on account of the ballooning crowd. In the middle of the almost obscenely sleek convoy is an equally sleek hearse. POLO (39, Mile's Uncle, Drunkard, Heart of Gold, emotionally immature and witless when he chooses to be) pushes past Miles. He bangs the palms of his hands against the car's door.

POLO
*Woi he's gone. Where is my father?
Da-ddy! Where is my father?*

Polo's Friends hold him back. Polo fights them off and flings himself across the side of the vehicle. A thick layer of dust transfers to his suit.

CATHY (50, Miles' mother. Quiet. Fierce. Unforgiving), jumps out of one of the cars, holding a large picture of her father in one hand and a white handkerchief in the other. She uses that hand to help her mother, Dani (71, ageless, wise, quirky, suffering from Alzheimer's disease) out of the car. In her hand are a four large books. Journals. Miles' breath gets caught in his throat briefly.

A few men open the back of the hearse. Miles joins them. Anyang' follows behind him. Anyang' stares at Miles' large hair for a moment too long.

ANYANG'

Mkubwa, That hair...you don't want to cut it?

Miles, thrown off by the comment, awkwardly chuckles. He turns his attention back to the hearse. They pull out a charcoal grey coffin with silver trimmings that glisten in the sun.

ANYANG' (CONT'D)

Don't touch the handles. *Utavunja*. Those are for decoration.

MILES

Lift from the base.

The men circle the casket as it slides from the hearse. Polo abruptly pushes one of the men away from the coffin. It shakes.

POLO

Move. *Songa, songa*.

Polo proceeds to take his place as a pallbearer. The casket tilts, but the men regain control.

MILES

Are you good?

They all hesitate, waiting for Polo's response. He barks at them.

POLO

Twende. Lets go.

The masses part like the Red Sea. A clear path to the verandah opens up. The men shuffle towards it.

Cathy, Dani and the other family members who've emerged from the convoy follow behind them: some of them clearly wishing they were somewhere else.

The men place the casket on a wheeled stand, laid out on the edge of the verandah. Most of them take a step back. Polo's theatrical antics continue.

POLO (CONT'D)
Da-ddy! Da-ddy! Da-ddy...

Alex and some of the other cousins help Miles wheel the casket to a spot in the middle of the large verandah.

MILES
To the right.

ANYANG'
Hapo sawa.

MILES
Wait.

Victoria emerges from the house with two large white cloths. She tosses one over to Miles. They rub the thin layer of dust that formed during the brief commute from the cars to the house off the coffin.

VICTORIA
(whispering)
I knew he did high-school drama,
but, Jesus--

Miles stifles a chuckle. They angle it to face away from the sun. Alex places worn-out plastic seats in front of the casket. Various family members take them.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)
That's actually not a terrible
shade of grey.

The priest and his procession, swathed in long purple robes and sparkling gold vestments begin a series of prayers.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)
You want to crack a '50 Shades'
joke so badly, don't you?

MILES
No, because that's low hanging
fruit.

Dani stands by the end of the casket, tightly holding on to Cathy. Her eyes glisten with tears.

MILES (CONT'D)

But I want you to know that I had a really good one.

In reverence, most of the wailing halts.

MILES (CONT'D)

I'll tell you later.

VICTORIA

Tell me later?

Miles and Victoria stand close to each other watching in silence with the others. Without peeling his eyes away from the coffin:

MILES (CONT'D)

I picked it. The color.

Victoria, also staring at the coffin, takes his hand into hers gently.

The priest performs a prayer and walks around the coffin sprinkling holy water onto it. The drops hang onto the grey surface like rain suspended in dark clouds. Miles slides over to a teary Alex.

MILES (CONT'D)

Wreath?

Alex springs to action and runs through the crowd to the hearse.

A deacon lights the incense in a silver thurible. The chains rattle in the silence. The priest repeats his incantations, this time in *Dholuo*, and circles the coffin once more as he flings the thurible about. Billows of smoke wrap around the casket. Cathy's dry heaving triggers a series of muffled cries from around her.

Alex struggles to hold up the large wreath made up entirely of white lilies.

VICTORIA

The St. Josephs' you too?

MILES

Every bud I could find in Nairobi. I had nothing to do with the tan suit, however.

VICTORIA

I appreciate the heads-up.

Alex shuffles along the casket and places the arrangement in the center. The catholic procession backs away.

MILES
Put them at the...

Miles steps forward, grabs the wreath and shuffles the it to the center of the coffin: just slightly out of the way of the ridge where the casket opens. He looks over at his mother and nods - seeking permission.

Cathy nods back. Victoria helps Miles swing the casket open. They both step away. Miles barely looks inside. Dani and Cathy inch towards it. Polo follows behind them. Like a ripple through the crowd, the animated crying resumes. Dani looks into the coffin. An older man, MAJOR (76, at death) is stuffed into an ill-fitting tan suit. He lies motionless. The thickest grin stretches across his face. Victoria leans over to Miles - eyes still trained at the lifeless body.

VICTORIA
Is he--

MILES
Yeup.

VICTORIA
They could't--

MILES
Apparently not.

Dani stares at the man's greying skin like she doesn't recognize it. She doesn't recognize him. She wiggles out of Cathy's hold and absentmindedly hands Miles the journals she was gripping. There is a little hesitation as he takes them. Dani places her now free hand gently on Major's right cheek, palming over his apparent smile.

DANI
Why have you embarrassed us?

This sends Polo over the edge. He lets out a guttural shriek and falls to the ground.

POLO
Da-ddy! Da-ddy! Da-ddy!

He chants this repeatedly. Loudly. Then softly. He grabs the base of the stand the coffin has been placed on. Cathy blows into her handkerchief. From the gate a large group of traditional leaders adorned in tan suits of various shades and cow hide, bearing spears and shields, loudly chant traditional songs.

VICTORIA
The spears are a nice touch.

Miles looks on. Expressionless. One of the elders runs back and forth. Miles looks down at the journals in his hand.

[FLASHBACK - 2005] EXT/INT. MASENO HOUSE - VERANDAH - DAY

A YOUNG MILES (13) runs through the verandah and into the house, clutching his tattered diary: a school exercise book covered in old newspaper. Much of the house is different but, in some ways, in the ways it matters, much of it looks the same.

The walls glow in the soft peach. The living room is all velvet, wood and trapped nostalgia. Major and Dani's wedding china, the kind they only put out for 'guests' is packed inside an ornate old mahogany wall unit that divides the living room and dining area. Crisp white crocheted seat covers are carefully tucked into the edges of the maroon seats. Table protectors made from PVC and vinyl dangle recklessly over the edge of the sturdy oak dining-room table.

Photos of Miles' entire family line the walls. They compete for space with imagery of white Jesus, outdated calendars and prayer-hand clocks with bible quotes etched into them.

LO (O.S.)

Tumezoeana. I'm not running after you.

Miles bursts into:

[FLASHBACK - 2005] INT. MASENO HOUSE - MAJOR'S STUDY - DAY

Major is seated behind an old oak desk set at the far end of the room. He furiously writes into the outer margins of a book. The room is lined by book-filled shelves that seems to abscond order. Endless piles of books frame his desk. Resting at the center of the study is an old grey couch. Beside it is a cheap pinewood table marked with coffee mug rings burned into the varnish.

Hidden between curtains that appear to never have been drawn and a pile of old dog-eared magazines are Military accolades splayed haphazardly against the only shelf-free wall in the room: medals, certificates, ribbons: all belonging to Major.

A few pictures of Major on active duty with the Kenyan Air Force, some of him and his wife and one of his children cluster near the edge of his desk. Noticeably however, the only picture of color hanging in the study is a staged photo of Major wherein he appears to give an infant Miles a sip of beer from an unopened Guinness bottle.

LO (O.S.)
Tumezoeana. I'm not running after
you.

Major, without looking up from his book, cracks a smile. He fiddles with the edge of his large bi-focal glasses and looks over at the door a second before it swings open. Miles powers in.

MAJOR
Mmm. What have you done?

A cheeky smile curves across Miles' face. Major chuckles. Lo enters the room after him tightly holding on to a plate of fruit. Miles moves further into the study to avoid her.

LO
You think your grandfather will
protect you? *Wewe ni vita unataka.*

Miles sits on the floor by the books and pretends to read one.

MAJOR
What is it? Pawpaw?

Lo tilts the plate to show Major its content.

LO
Melon. His mother has left clear
instructions. He must eat fruits. I
don't want her shouting at me--

MAJOR
Mmh. Leave it. He'll eat it.

Lo reluctantly drops the fruit plate on the table and leaves. Miles looks up at his grandfather. Major has resumed his writing. Miles seemingly unsure of what to do, reaches for a random book and opens it. His face twists in frustration as he attempts to read the dense text. Only the scratch of pen against paper can be heard.

MAJOR (CONT'D)
Do you want to find a book you
actually want to read? Mmh? Or are
you happy with
(looks up)
Kenyan Law Reports volume 6?

Miles drops the offending book, stands up and looks around at the mountain of other books that envelope the room.

MILES

Which one should I get.

MAJOR

Mmh. Which one do you want?

Miles fiddles around with a few options. He pulls a short neon-green plastic step close to the wall of books to gain some height. Major goes back to writing, occasionally looking up in amusement of the child's antics. Miles picks and drops books until he lands on one with a beautiful drawing of a white man on its cover.

MILES

This one.

Major stretches his hand out and motions him over. Miles complies.

MAJOR

Hmm?

Major looks over the book from under his glasses.

MILES

I'll get another one--

MAJOR

Mm mmh. It's okay. You want to read this. Why did you pick it?

Miles clears his throat. Nervous.

MILES

I like the cover.

Major chuckles. Miles smirks in mild shame.

MAJOR

Mmm. It is a good cover. Sit.

Major stands up and walks to the shelves. Unlike Miles, he knows what he's after.

MAJOR (CONT'D)

My teachers called him the greatest writer of all time. Mmh.

Miles takes a seat on the couch. Major grabs a copy of Ngugi Wa Thiongo's 'The River Between' and dusts off its green cover before taking a seat next to Miles. He hands Miles Ngungi's book.

MAJOR (CONT'D)

I learnt much, much, later, that
this history - and books like these
- did not have room for stories
from the world I knew.

He takes the book Miles is holding: A reprint of 'Hamlet'.

MAJOR (CONT'D)

The people in this did not look or
sound like me. They did not live
where I had lived. They do not know
what I know. But this one...

He hands the book back to Miles.

MAJOR (CONT'D)

Read them both. Then decide which
one you like more. Mmh?

Miles opens Ngugi's book and settles down on a comfortable spot on the carpet. Major reaches for the plate of watermelon and eats it while he stares at his grandson. He puts the plate down grabs a pen from the side stool and unfurls a note book from a pile of similar looking journals. All leather bound.

[PRESENT DAY] EXT. MASENO HOUSE - FRONT VERANDAH - DAY

The family are settled awkwardly in front of the casket. A line of mourners stretches out of the compound. Cathy is seated in between her mother and Miles. Loud condolences, performative grief and rowdy, elbow-injuring handshakes punctuate the air. A STRANGER extends their hand. Miles lets go of his grandfather's leather-bound journals and takes it.

STRANGER

Mos ahinya, Nyakwara.

MILES

Erokamano.

This action is repeated. Again and again. Miles is lost in thought. His breathing slows down. He coughs to try and regain his bearings. He cracks the knuckles in his hand and extends it out over and over. Each time, a new foreign hand grabs it.

MILES (CONT'D)

Erokamno ahinya.

STRANGER 2

Ehh. Mjukku. Nairobi kuko sawa?

With her free hand, Cathy takes a hold of his bicep. She squeezes it tightly - perhaps sensing his growing distress. Every few seconds he stretches his arm out to shake another stranger's hand.

MILES

Tushapoa. Thank you.

A WOMAN Miles doesn't recognise screams and falls onto the coffin. The base of the casket shifts. Everyone charges to help her. Miles remains seated. He drowns out the wailing. Alex emerges from the gate - caught somewhere between a brisk walk and a light run. Miles stares at the casket, careful not to lift himself up high enough to look inside it. Grateful that his view is being blocked by the people helping the woman up.

Another WOMAN dressed in church regalia stands in front of her and blocks his view. She extends her hand. Miles reaches out for it, grateful for the distraction.

CHURCH WOMAN

I read that thing you wrote.

MILES

Tushapo-- oh. Uhm...

Miles frames her into his focus. He sits up in his chair. His expression is that of an animal who has suddenly been pounced upon by a predator.

CHURCH WOMAN

The Women's Deliverance Union of Christ's Love and Eternal Joy would like to invite you to a prayer meeting this afternoon.

MILES

Oh? Thank you. I'm not sure I can make--

The woman tightens her grip.

CHURCH WOMAN

My son it won't take long. A short prayer? And maybe a chat? Is that what you call them? 'Chats'?

She seemed tickled by her own enthusiasm.

CHURCH WOMAN (CONT'D)

I'm sure your mother won't mind?

The woman looks over at Cathy who tunes into the conversation. Miles meets her eyes and searches them. Cathy remains stoic.

ALEX
(whispering)
Miles?

Miles turns around.

EXT. GRAVESITE - DAY

Just outside the compound, to the far left of the perimeter hedge, several working-class men with shovels stand idly under an avocado tree watching Polo and Miles engage with ANYANG' (57) the Chairman of the funeral organizing committee (Major's younger brother): and the DEACON (37). Their boss, ABSALOM (39, Frustratingly fit. Direct. Kind smile), stands close to the warring factions.

ANYANG'
It was decided last week already--

POLO
Who decided? You and that sham committee.

MILES
Anyang', Major left clear instructions.

POLO
I am the head of this Household.
I'm not arguing with you about this.

Anyang' points back to the house and defiantly inches towards Polo. Miles glances over at Absalom and does a double take. Victoria squats between two weather-beaten tombstones. On her left is a large rough rectangle outline marked by chalk. She seems lost in her own world, unbothered by the fight ensuing around her.

ANYANG'
The head of this family is lying in that casket and he is to be buried here. Next to his children. Facing the sun. It is tradition--

Victoria plucks out overgrown weeds from the sides of the tombstones. Miles watches her.

DEACON
Mkubwa, please. Lets just--

ANYANG'
Why are you here?

Miles's attention rests on Victoria as she blankly stares at the tombstones.

MILES
(to Victoria)
You okay?

She springs up abruptly.

VICTORIA
I'm good. Left my phone in the house.

Victoria walks off. Absalom notices some of his men settling down on the ground. Another lights a cigarette. Absalom shifts his spade and taps the ground with it.

ABSALOM
We need to get going.

DEACON
Polo asked the church to mediate--

ANYANG'
Nothing is being mediated. Absalom?
Kazi kwenu.

Absalom turns to address his men.

ABSALOM
Haiya, twende!

His men reluctantly start inching towards the site.

POLO
Absalom, if you want to get paid,
Tell your men to dig where my
father instructed.

Miles exhales and takes a seat on a rock, placing the journals in his hand down next to him. He calls Alex over for an aside. He whispers in his ear and gets an inaudible response. Miles turns his attention back to the other men.

ANYANG'
We are wasting time--

POLO
Deacon, talk to your friend.

ANYANG'
Young man, *tuheshimiane*. I have
socks older than you.

ALEX
(Whispering)
Is he wearing them?

MILES
I've just been informed that the
chief arrived half an hour ago. I'm
happy to call him in to settle
this.

A silence lulls the moment. Absalom smirks, admiring Mile's
approach.

ANYANG'
Kijana, What are you trying? What
does this generation have against
tradition? Where is the respect--

MILES
Respect is earned, Anyang'. I
respect the law. And The law is on
Polo's side.

Miles and Anyang' stare each other down. Anyang' exhales, as
though in resignation. Miles struggles to hide his smugness.
Polo is damn near smiling.

ANYANG'
Call him.

Miles is thrown off. Anyang holds his ground.

ANYANG' (CONT'D)
Call him, now. I heard that he had
questions about your article. Call
him.

Miles's firmness collapses. Polo glares at him.

ALEX
Should I--

ANYANG'
This is not Nairobi. We do things
right here. Absalom?

POLO
Anyang', you cannot just--

ANYANG'
Shut up!

Anyang's finger circles in the air. Absalom whistles and his men begin digging on the spot. Polo, grunts and kicks the ground hard. Dirt rises up, barely missing Anyang' who isn't moved by the juvenile display of frustration. Polo storms off - down towards the village. Anyang' takes a proud stroll over to Miles.

ANYANG'
You're summoning bad things upon
yourself and this family.

Anyang' walks back to the vigil, greeting mourners as the continue to stream in. Miles hangs there by Absalom and his men. The two of them exchange a hard stare.

EXT. MASENO HOUSE - COMPOUND - DAY

Victoria, seeing Miles' defeated return, places her clipboard under her arm and sends him mock air kisses. He catches them. Miles notices his other cousins watching as he approaches her. He falls into her chest.

VICTORIA
Being buried alive?

MILES
Your hand would suddenly emerge
from the dirt, holding a cellphone.

Victoria chuckles and gently hits him with her clipboard.

VICTORIA
I don't have that kind of upper
body strength.

She rubs his back gently.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)
What happened?

MILES
I've decided to pick my battles.
And you? you okay? Also, how do you
still smell so good?

Miles nestles tightly into her chest.

VICTORIA

Good genes. Y'know half the family
already think we're dating?

Miles pushes up from her.

MILES

I assure you they don't think that
anymore.

VICTORIA

Now, see. You spilling tea
nationally is messing with my
marital prospects.

Victoria's eye catches something to Miles' left. Miles turns
around to see what Victoria is getting excited about.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)

Finally. Some real fun.

Miles' phenomenally queer friends arrive framed in
appropriate 'pomp and circumstance'. They jump out of a
vehicle, looking around.

MOONIE (31, bald, sure of himself, effortlessly fashionable).

EDDY (29 stick thin, unbothered by everything, can capture an
emotion with a single raised brow).

DWAYNE (28 thick, hilarious, unimaginably kind, the sharpest
tongue).

GEORGIE (34, the grown one, laid back, funny, alcoholic).

OLIVER (31, white Italian with the thickest Kenyan accent,
tan from growing up East African).

MANO (32, beautiful, crazy hair, a member of the most popular
boyband in Kenya).

Miles's face is caught somewhere between a smile and a jaw-
drop.

MILES

They were coming tomorrow--

VICTORIA

This is what happens when you mute
Whatsapp group chats. Bottoms up.

MILES

Too easy.

They spot Miles. The block marking the broadness of his
shoulders crumbles. His physicality melts into the softest
version of itself. Victoria watches the transformation in
muted awe.

OLIVER

(loudly)

Sis!? Come here.

Miles reaches for the hug and holds tightly.

OLIVER (CONT'D)

Pole sana, madame.

He proceeds to hug everyone. Victoria gets in on the action
too.

EDDY

Also-plus, that colour has truly
agreed with your skin.

VICTORIA

Flattery will get you everywhere,
Eddy. *Nimeku*-miss.

GEORGIE

Haiya, tumefika. Wapi food?

MILES

I'm really here for how practical
your priorities are.

The two hug mid-laughter. Georgie pats Miles' back
reassuringly. He hangs on for a second longer. Tighter.

GEORGIE

It's 80% of the reason I came to be
honest.

MILES

To be very honest.

GEORGIE

To be quite honest.

EDDY

Babe, *hebu* just come here.

Miles hugs Eddy and turns to Victoria, still holding on to Eddy's waist.

MILES
Is their tent ready?

She offers him a quizzical look. He half-smiles. She gets the hint.

VICTORIA
It will be.

DWAYNE
Kwani you didn't know we were coming, *ama*?

Moonie shouts out from the car.

MOONIE (O.S.)
I told you this hooker muted us.

MILES
(Shouting back)
Listen, heifer. Who is forcing you to lie?

Eddy hugs Miles.

EDDY
Pole baba.

MILES
Tushapoa, my love. How are you?

Oliver pats himself dry with a white handkerchief as he looks around the compound.

OLIVER
Ngai. Why does it feel like we're sitting squarely in the Devil's butt-crack?

DWAYNE
It's literally the same temperature as Vipingo, babe.

GEORGIE
But you see there *kuna ka*-pool and prosecco on tap, so...

The boys clap emphatically.

MILES
Only facts.

DWAYNE
Okay?

EDDY
Okay, yes but--

GEORGIE
But nothing, ho!

EDDY
Aki this is *kidogo struggle-ina*,
babes. But this your grandparent's
house is *a-bit-a-bit* massive, yeah?

Moonie, with his gorgeous tote bag in hand, effortlessly
emerges from the car.

MOONIE
Me, I could happily live here.

He comes in for a gently hug from Miles.

MOONIE (CONT'D)
Siz, hakuna NTSA *huku*? How are you?

MILES
Was everyone speeding?

MANO
First of all, on which roads?

DWAYNE
That tarmac came to a very abrupt
end and I truly saw the end, *weh!*

MILES
Dying in a car does not align with
my fantasy.

Eddy counts on his fingers.

EDDY
A car, a boat a plane - rejected!
Ah ah! Meêee, If a plane I'm in
crashes and I'm not in First or
Business... can you imagine?

MOONIE
They must just leave my body
wherever it lands. It's where I
belong.

None of them realise that they've attracted the attention
and interest of staring mourners. Victoria and Miles give
each other knowing looks. She settles herself between Georgie
and Oliver and takes each of them by the hand.

VICTORIA
You two are coming to help.

OLIVER
This is violence--

GEORGIE
So babes you know manual labour and
I...mmh mmh. Sioni.

VICTORIA
We'll pass by the kitchen on the
way to the tents.

George spins around, eagerly, pushing towards the house.

GEORGIE
Say less.

OLIVER
Violence!

Miles breaks into a hearty laugh. Victoria ushers them away.
Moonie uses the crease of his jaw to point at Mano.

MOONIE
Then this one insisted on getting
coffee to go.

MANO
Me I'm working on three hours of
sleep, yeah?

DWAYNE
Most of it ended up on that his *ki-*
shirt.

Mano tries rubs the crinkles on the section of his shirt that
has dried coffee stains on it.

MANO
Which I fully stole from *Mama Nani*
over here.

EDDY
D'you know what?

MANO (CONT'D)
Calm down. Bring my sheer
tank top back, first.

EDDY (CONT'D)
Actually, I think Raju has it.

MANO
So your wardrobe has become
gikomba?

Eddy clutches his invisible pearls.

EDDY

Excuse? My wardrobe is Harrods,
babes. Taste.

Moonie chuckles loudly and claps animatedly.

MOONIE

Wheh! Hebu don't mention Harrods. I
still have PTSD. Did I ever tell
you girls how Eddy and I found
ourselves at a Harrods in London?

EDDY

Ai meeee, why are you putting my
bourgeoisie tendencies on blast?

Eddy pretends to walk away.

MANO

You can't trust this hoe to keep
your stories.

EDDY

(in a terrible 'Cockney'
accent)
D'know what? Facts.

MILES

D'know what?

MANO

D'know what?

The gang bursts out into a rowdy cackle.

MOONIE

This hooker and I decided we were
going to ignore exchange rates for
a coat we both wanted.

EDDY

The poverty that followed after--

Eddy covers his face and lets his manicured fingers glide
down to his hips.

MOONIE

But *jameni* it was soooo chic.
Homosexuality is truly a burden.

DWAYNE

Kuna WiFi?

MOONIE

I swear if there's wifi, I'm moving here.

From behind the motley crew, we see a tall statuesque man arrive and walk into the compound. NATHANIEL (38, gorgeous, slippery tongue, extremely adaptive - reads like a black Eric from the Little Mermaid). Miles has his back turned to him.

EDDY

Okay but you now - we literally just established that we're in *shags*.

DWAYNE

Ah Ah! Some of our folks built their *shags* houses in civilisation, yeah? Thanks.

EDDY

With *pesa ya* corruption, in fact.

MOONIE

I think we might be trying to gentrify *ushago* and I'm very concerned.

MANO

Hashtag not all *shags*.

Silence. The boys stare at him before breaking into knowing laughter.

MILES

Woi, Mami, that was bad.

EDDY

Dad jokes? We're doing dad jokes?

In the distance, Nathaniel is greeted by various family members. Cathy hugs him tightly and excuses herself. Nathaniel looks around, stoping only after spotting Miles, and gets lost in watching him and his friends interact.

MOONIE

First, even before we continue--

EDDY

Ai, babe, *si* we've been--

MOONIE

That article of yours was all kinds of *moto* fire. *Weh! Makofi*.

Moonie shrieks in excitement. The other boys clap animatedly.

MILES

Fuck a fucking duck Victoria what the fuck? What the actual fu--

VICTORIA

What did I tell him?

Alex peeps into the door, holding Victoria's shoes and the dusty clipboard.

ALEX

Uhm, you dropped--

MILES

Toka.

VICTORIA

Get out.

Alex backs out of the room.

MILES (CONT'D)

Listen, yeah? Listen, you can't just...Vicky you can't--

Victoria stops pacing and comes up to Miles.

VICTORIA

What did I tell him?

Silence.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)

What did I tell him--

MILES

On sight--

VICTORIA

On sight. He knows it. I told him. You watched me tell him, did you not?

MILES

He could have been---you could have been hurt--

She jumps back into her pacing, gesticulating like a pantomime with far too much to say.

VICTORIA

I told him and he chose not to believe me. That's on him, Miles. I didn't pop him in the face hard enough...

MILES
Calm down, Suge Knight.

Miles takes a seat on the bed and touches the parts that hurt on his face.

VICTORIA
Did I hit you? Fuck--

MILES
It's fine--

VICTORIA
Why is he here? Why the fuck--

MILES
He's, I don't know, family?

VICTORIA
The fuck he is.

Victoria pats her pockets down frantically.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)
Where's my phone?

MILES
Don't change the subject--

VICTORIA
Where's my phone, I need to text someone.

Alex peeps into the door again.

ALEX
Hi--

Miles and Victor rail fire on him.

VICTORIA Jesus, stay the fuck out-- MILES Holy fuck, this kid--

This time Alex doesn't enter. He extends his hand into the room from outside the door, holding Victoria's phone. She grabs it and he jumps back. Victoria immediately starts texting.

MILES (CONT'D)
Vicky, honestly, that was not cool.

Polo bursts into the room, fuming, and goes right for Victoria.

POLO
 What are you doing?
 (to miles)
 What is she doing?

VICTORIA
 Are you committed to using that
 tone with me right now?

Victoria lines herself up to confront Polo. Miles moves between them. Victoria is rearing to go again.

MILES
 Polo, I've got this.

POLO
 Do you?

VICTORIA
 Polo, I don't have it in me to
 carry your shit right now, do you
 understand? You can catch some of
 this smoke. Fuck with me--

POLO
 (shouting)
 This is my father's funeral. Have
 some respect.

VICTORIA
 (to miles)
 Who ordered this *Vioja Mahakamani*
 performance?

MILES
 Stop. Stop it.

Victoria and Polo stare each other off until he exits, banging the door behind him.

MILES (CONT'D)
 See--

VICTORIA
 What a fucking cunt.

MILES
 Vicky!

VICTORIA
 I'm calm.

Miles glares at her. He doesn't believe her in the slightest.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)

M, I'm calm. Promise. I'm just gonna go--

MILES

Ma'am, if you don't sit your G.I. Jane ass down right now...

Victoria breaks into an involuntary chuckle.

EXT. MASENO HOUSE - VERANDAH - DAY

Miles takes a seat next to his mother. The lines are still long, but most of the mourners give the family space.

CATHY

What's gotten into your girlfriend?

Miles adjusts in his seat and contemplates the question of a moment.

MILES

Nothing. She's fine.

Cathy looks him over. His eyes are trained ahead, but he can sense her gaze on him. Cathy shuffles to stand up, letting go of her mother.

CATHY

I'm going to organise a room for Nate. Come sit next to her.

Miles, swallows hard but obliges. He adjusts Dani's broach.

MILES

Dani, maji?

Dani nods her head in agreement. Miles looks around, searching for Alex, but he can't spot him. He moves to stand up. Dani suddenly grabs onto his hand tightly. He stops and looks at her: fear and confusion flood her eyes. Her grip gets tighter.

DANI

Where are we?

Miles sits back down and palms her other hand into his own. He looks around and spots Polo and his drinking buddies hurdled in a corner. They make eye contact. Miles tries to subtly point towards the coffin with his jaw. Polo doesn't immediately get the hint. Miles gets slightly more animated, being careful not further agitate Dani.

DANI (CONT'D)
Where is Baba Polo?

Polo, seeming to finally understand what is going on, walks over to the casket and immediately closes it. The base shakes - and like a siren call, the sound alerts Anyang who emerges from a group of old men.

ANYANG'
What are you doing?

POLO
Mummy needs to rest.

MILES
We'll resume shortly--

Anyang' tries to stop Miles from helping Dani get up.

ANYANG'
She must sit here and receive her guests.

MILES
She just needs a quick lie down--

ANYANG'
I'm not talking to you.

DANI
Are we leaving?

Miles bites his lower lip. Dani gets more agitated. Anyang' pleads with her.

ANYANG'
Nyar Asego please do not bring any more shame onto the family.

DANI
What?

POLO
Anyang' please--

ANYANG'
It is customary for--

MILES
Anyang'. Move.

Miles places himself between Anyang' and his grandmother. He helps her up. Anyang' is fuming, Cathy walks back out.

CATHY
What's going on?

Dani's face lights up on seeing Cathy. She reaches for a hug.

DANI
Oh, my daughter is here! When did you arrive? Why has nobody told me my child had arrived? Your room is not ready. Polo, where is Solomon...

MILES
We need to get her to bed.

Cathy immediately understands and helps get Dani up from her seat.

DANI
Have you eaten. Solomon? Polo, have you seen your father?

Anyang' tags behind Cathy and whispers.

ANYANG'
Talk to your son, Nyako. My patience is running thin--

Cathy offers him an empty stare. Anyang releases her hand. She turns her attention back to her mother.

CATHY
Come. Let's go.

Anyang' walks up to the coffin and opens the casket. Polo and him stand off. Polo walks into the house, after his mother. Anyang' stares at his brother in the casket.

ANYANG'
Your spawn are all demons.

INT. MASENO HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Cathy tucks her mother into her plush bed. The bedroom walls are painted in off-white. A thick military-green band runs across the room near the edge of the ageing crown moulding. The large built-in cupboards overflow with neatly packed clothes and hanging coats - all colour coordinated. Miles spots his reflection in the three-way vanity. Polo stoically looks on from the doorway. Cathy looks around at all the reminders of her father. Pictures, clothes, shoes.

CATHY

Please ask Lo to get this cleaned
up a little?

Miles nods 'yes'. They file out of the room, shuffling past Polo who seems lost. He stares at his mother. Dani is wide awake lying on her side, staring at window; deeply confused but quiet. She turns to look at Polo, then turns back to her window. He moves to sit on the bed with her in silence.

EXT. MASENO HOUSE - VERANDAH - DAY

PHILEMON (52, erratic, non-committal, opportunistic, rotund), Miles' father and Cathy's ex-husband strolls into the compound. He greets the group of elders who've gathered in their corner sipping traditional beer from long Bamboo straws. He is received with relative warmth. Cathy looks on - glaring. Miles comes up from behind her and places his hand on her back.

CATHY

Did he get the wreath?

He turns to look into the living room. Cathy and Miles form an odd yin and yang frame: him, looking into the house, her looking out into the compound, throwing daggers at Philemon.

MILES

I sorted it.

Philemon spots the pair and sighs. Cathy cocks herself up as he approaches them. Philemon is holding an entirely unconvincing smile. The three of them stand in an odd triangle.

PHILEMON

Cathy.

Miles spins around to face him.

CATHY

Philemon.

PHILEMON

Miles.

Miles nods. Silence. A woman entering the compound begins to yell in mourning. The three of them hold their stance. The wailing, juxtaposed against the awkward silence becomes almost comical. Philemon looks around.

PHILEMON (CONT'D)

Yes. About the flowers, I know I said--

MILES

It's really okay.

PHILEMON

I brought goats.

CATHY

Who asked for goats?

Philemon gets worked up - he is nervous. The people around them start to stare.

PHILEMON

Okay. *Sawa. Pole basi.*

CATHY

How many?

PHILEMON

Maybe 5? I didn't count--

Cathy turns to leave.

CATHY

Alex, where is Mama Annette?

Alex, carrying far more nervous energy than he should, springs up from the belly of the kitchen, holding his note pad in one hand and a plate of arrowroots in the other.

ALEX

Wa Kanisa? I'm not sure--

CATHY

Find her. There a goats here. She can take them to the church.

Cathy walks off. Alex searches Miles' face for answers that aren't exactly forthcoming. He drops the plate next to Miles and runs to follow Cathy. Philemon and Miles stand in awkward silence again. Miles takes an arrowroot rather absentmindedly and takes a bite out of it.

PHILEMON

Yes. So. Did the, uhm-- the service. Did it run long?

MILES

It was fine.

PHILEMON

Good. Good. I mean, not good as in--

Miles tries to speak through the bite, but it feels like ash in his mouth. He swallows hard.

PHILEMON (CONT'D)

I'm sorry about the flowers.

Miles waves it off. He looks away, searching for a napkin to put the arrow root in.

PHILEMON (CONT'D)

Is that good?

MILES

Mmh? Oh. Yes.

PHILEMON

It looks dry--

MILES

Practically sawdust.

Miles puts the arrow root down on a paper plate.

PHILEMON

I can't remember the last time I was here.

Miles briefly looks into the room and spots an decorative whip ornately placed against a wall before offering his father something between a smile and a sigh. Philemon's attention is drawn to loud cackling from outside. Dwayne and some of his friends are palm-slapping while trying to hush themselves.

PHILEMON (CONT'D)

Are those your friends outside?

MILES

Some of them, yes.

PHILEMON

Mmmh. Yes. It's good that they came.

More awkward silence. Miles clears his throat.

MILES

I should probably--

MILES (CONT'D)

--go. Oh. I'm on leave--

PHILEMON (CONT'D)

How's work?

PHILEMON (CONT'D)

--I'm sorry. Yes, yes of course.

The silence between them is painful. The dull sounds of mourners wailing in the distance fills in the gaps.

PHILEMON (CONT'D)
I'm going to speak to--

Philemon looks around for an out. His eyes desperately search for anyone he recognizes. Nothing.

PHILEMON (CONT'D)
I'm going to, uhm--

MILES
Nathaniel is by the satellite dish.

PHILEMON
Yes, yes. Let me say hello then?

Silence. Miles's gently pats the side of his leg with his palms. Philemon broadens a smile.

PHILEMON (CONT'D)
It's good to see you, Baba.

Miles nods. Philemon swivels on his hind legs and attempts to walk off - uncertainty marking his gait. Miles exhales and looks on. Philemon stops and turns abruptly.

PHILEMON (CONT'D)
Yes, do you need money?

Miles is thrown off.

MILES
I think we've got it--

PHILEMON
It's okay. You can ask.

MILES
No. Really. It's fine--

Philemon points at the arrowroot. Miles looks at his father intently.

PHILEMON
I could send for some more food?
Seeing as your mother has
practically given away--

Miles exhales, closing his eyes.

MILES
Postgrad.

Philemon pauses. Miles opens his eyes.

MILES (CONT'D)
The school in London? I got in.

Philemon extends his hand out - beaming with some version of joy.

PHILEMON
That's exceptional news. Put it here.

Miles looks at it and reluctantly extends his own. Philemon furiously shakes it, pulling him in for a strained hug and a few pats on the back. He releases Miles and adjusts his suit.

PHILEMON (CONT'D)
Full ride?

MILES
Not exactly.

Philemon's smile fades. Slowly.

PHILEMON
Oh. Baba. When I asked I meant--
for Major, maybe--

Miles cracks his neck, smirking at the floor.

PHILEMON (CONT'D)
Uhm-- it's not a great time. Kevin needed new uniform and-- You know if I could help, I would, yes?

MILES
They offered me a job. I'll be teaching and working. And writing.

Silence.

PHILEMON
Yes. Good. That's great.

Miles lets out an involuntary chuckle and catches himself quickly - regaining his composure. Philemon turns to exit again but snaps back. Miles lets out an audible sigh.

PHILEMON (CONT'D)
Yes, Doreen asked me to say hello to you.

MILES
Who?

Philemon looks disarmed. His smile disappears.

MILES (CONT'D)

Oh. The wife. Of course. How's the little one? I want to say Cain?

PHILEMON

Yes, Caleb.

EXT. MASENO HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Miles and Victoria are packing things away. Dani is on the bed staring at her food. Victoria rummages through a box of Major's old memorabilia. Dani stares out of the window lost in space.

VICTORIA

Miles, you knew that poor boy's name.

MILES

He looked genuinely hurt. Vicky, one makes their own joy. How are you doing there, *Dani*?

Dani turns. She and Miles share a smile.

MILES (CONT'D)

We'll put everything back as soon as everyone's left. I promise.

She nods - a little confused, but willing to trust Miles. She turns back to her food and takes a small bite.

VICTORIA

Did he ask about me?

MILES

Your narcissism knows no bounds. He still thinks your name is Ashley.

VICTORIA

As in- how?

Victoria sits on the bed and fans through old pictures. Miles carries a box of clothes and shoves them in a closet. Victoria walks over to Dani, holding an old picture of Miles with his grandfather. She kneels beside Dani and shows it to her. Miles looks on. Pausing his work.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)

Look at how handsome our boys used to be.

Dani's face brightens. She looks up at Miles.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)
Is that Phil? Your father was kinda
cute--

MILES
Don't.

VICTORIA
I mean, if you tilt your head you
can still see it--

MILES
Jesus, Victoria.

VICTORIA
These are literally your genes I'm
talking about. Positively, I might
add.

Victoria picks up another photo of young Miles.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)
This is the 69th photo--

MILES
Cute.

VICTORIA
Thank you. 69th photo of you in
this ugly sweater. Your history of
poor color choices is well
documented.

MILES
Lemme?

Miles takes the photo and smiles at the innocence of his
outfit. He then spots his childhood diary, desperately
clasped in his hands.

[FLASHBACK - 2005] INT. MASENO HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Young Miles is on the bed, at-top his yellow fleece blanket -
the kind with a picture of a pug playing poker on it. He
furiously writes in his diary. He is startled by a knock on
his door. Before he can respond, the door creaks open. His
father stands in the light of the hallway.

PHILEMON
Yes! *Mkubwa!*

Philemon puts his hands in his pocket and saunters in. Miles shoves his diary under his pillow.

PHILEMON (CONT'D)
Did they fix this window?

Philemon walks over to the window. He wiggles the broken handle. Miles trails him with his eyes. Entirely on edge.

PHILEMON (CONT'D)
Are your friends back home? *Akina nani*- what's their name? The one who went to Mombasa?

Miles hesitates.

MILES
Tutu--

PHILEMON
Yes! Tutu. When was he coming back?

MILES
I'm not sure--

PHILEMON
I think they should be back by now, yes?

Miles adjusts himself again on the bed. His eyes dart around. They land back on his father who offers him an incredibly laboured smile.

PHILEMON (CONT'D)
That box of yours, *hiyo ya shule* - *ulisema* it was still broken, yes?

Miles takes a moment to figure out the motivation behind the question.

MILES
Yes.

PHILEMON
Yes. Maybe we should get it replaced. Baba Achieng' also bought a new one this week. He says there's a discount. So if we go back today, we can buy it tomorrow, yes?

Miles looks at his father, confused. He swallows hard. His emotions come bubbling to the surface as he starts to understand what his father is asking him to do.

PHILEMON (CONT'D)

So you want to go back, yes? Maybe you should tell your mother you want to go back.

MILES

I'm still finishing some books with *Kwaru* Major--

PHILEMON

I can buy you the books tomorrow.

Miles' tears fall to his own surprise. He tries to quickly dry them in an attempt to hide them from his father.

PHILEMON (CONT'D)

Stop that nonsense.

Miles does his best to offer a blank stare - even a misguided smile. Philemon exhales in reservation and makes his way to the door. Miles brushes his faces dry again and watches his father leave - and leave the door open. He takes out his diary from under his pillow and continues to write in it.

Philemon quietly trails back and watches his son's furious writing from the door.

PHILEMON (CONT'D)

What is that?

Miles looks up in horror. Silence.

PHILEMON (CONT'D)

Are you deaf? Bring it.

Miles hesitates. Philemon, like a dog whose caught on to a scent, swivels into the room.

[PRESENT DAY] INT. MASENO HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Miles is staring at the picture, lost in his own space. Victoria is seated with Dani on the bed. Dani palms one of the pictures

DANI

He looks like his grandfather here.

Miles snaps out of his trance when he hears her voice.

VICTORIA

He's ageing well, so we have that to look forward to.

MILES

Was that a compliment? *Dani* did you hear that?

Miles kisses Dani's cheek.

VICTORIA

You heard nothing.

Dani laughs as the two continue to bicker playfully.

MILES

You witnessed that--

VICTORIA

Fake news.

INT. MASENO HOUSE - DINING ROOM - DAY

Family members and friends hurdle around a lengthy table form made up of three smaller tables pushed together. The group included the Rweya sisters ACHIENG' and AKINYI (29, 27, spoilt, fancy, entitled). Miles tries his hardest not to look at Philemon and Nathaniel who are seated next to each other, engrossed in animated conversation.

ANYANG'

We need that cow found.

PHILEMON

You called a meeting for a cow?

Anyang' taps the piece of paper he's holding.

ANYANG'

We have other things to discuss too. Some new costs--

UNCLE 1

That entire list?

UNCLE 2

Where is the *Harrambe* money?

ANYANG'

Have you been eating air? Or is it manna? From heaven?

AKINYI

Can't we get him another one?

Polo scoffs, clearly regretting the decision to be there. Nathaniel glances over at Miles. He is practically staring.

POLO

What are we talking about?

AKINYI
Buying cow.

POLO
With what money?

Miles catches Nathaniel's gaze. Nathaniel looks away.

ACHIENG'
Eish. Come slowly. She's just
trying to be helpful.

ANYANG'
We can all help by finding the cow.
Next order of business--

NATHANIEL
I can pay for it.

PHILEMON
There's really no need. I'm sure we
can all--

NATHANIEL
Look, Major was like my father--

MILES
But he wasn't, was he?

Silence falls on the group for a moment as everyone stares at Miles. He's looking dead at Nathaniel. Then everyone starts talking over each other.

AKINYI
Uhm. Achi and I have to go soon?

ACHIENG'
The water we ordered is being
delivered.

ANYANG'
So I can strike that off the list?

PHILEMON
Can I see the list?

Philemon takes the list from Anyang' and scans over it.

AKINYI
We just got enough for Omondi,
Daddy, mum and us.

PHILEMON
Do we still need flowers?

ANYANG'
 You bought water just for your
 family?

Lo brings over a large tray holding a massive old peach
 thermos and metal cups. Amidst the chatter, she places them
 on the table.

PHILEMON
 I already bought goats so you can
 strike that -- pen?

ANYANG'
 Solomon, wapi kalamu?

Polo and Miles immediately cut Anyang' him off.

	POLO	MILES
It's Lo.		That's not her name.

Anyang' raises his hands as some kind of apology - a grin
 stretching over his face. Miles stands up in a huff and
 gently places his hand on Lo's shoulder.

MILES (CONT'D)
 I'll get the water. And the cow.
 And anything else on that list.
 Alex?

Alex emerges from the shadows, eating bread.

ALEX
 Yes, boss--

MILES
 No. Don't do that.

ALEX
 Sorry--

Miles hands him his bank card.

MILES
 I'll text you the pin.

He grabs the list from Philemon and hands it to Alex before
 heading for the door.

MILES (CONT'D)
 Get someone to help the Rweyas
 carry their water.

EXT. MASENO HOUSE - PARKING LOT - DAY

Dwayne and Miles are seated in the front seats of a smoke-filled van. Dwayne passes Miles a lit blunt and exhales into the air, letting himself swim into the moment. Miles inhales and holds it.

DWAYNE

He's making me write down everything.

MILES

Homework, even? Also, I will never understand people who willingly see male therapists.

DWAYNE

Don't hate on my *Dzaddy*. He helps me truly...open up.

MILES

Wacha umalaya, mami!

They burst into rowdy cackling.

MILES (CONT'D)

Mine used to suggest I do something similar.

DWAYNE

Did you?

MILES

You know I fucking love homework. I wrote the shit out of those Letters.

DWAYNE

Multiple?

MILES

To the people I love.

DWAYNE

Eh? Are you on that list?

Miles chuckles in the haze. He takes a big inhale of the joint.

MILES

Where are you guys staying?

DWAYNE
Haiya. I thought we were staying
 here?

Miles is caught mid-exhale and starts coughing.

MILES
 Wait, really? Hold on, let me call
 Victoria--

He springs up slower than he imagines and reaches for his
 phone.

DWAYNE
 Kisumu Royale.

Dwayne bursts out laughing.

MILES
 You whore! Please don't make me
 panic when I'm stoned.

DWAYNE
 Eddy's *mano* showed out. He also got
 us the flights.

MILES
 Love that for her. I just wish the
 guy wasn't such a creep, y'know?

DWAYNE
 Look, Edwina secured, and shared,
 that bag. Amen?

MILES
 Won't he do it? Hallelujah, *pliz*.

Miles takes one more puff and passes it back to Dwayne who
 ashes it into a wet serviette on the dashboard.

MILES (CONT'D)
 I'm glad you're here.

DWAYNE
 Yeah?

MILES
 Yeah.

DWAYNE
 Good. Because...

Dwayne holds out the last of the blunt. Miles waves it off.

MILES

I know. It's funeral things. That's all.

Dwayne takes a puff.

DWAYNE

I wonder sometimes. You don't talk to us these days. To me.

MILES

That's not true..

DWAYNE

Milo, you came out in a newspaper article and told none of us that it was going down.

MILES

Yeah. Yeah, that wasn't nice.

Miles looks away in knowing shame.

DWAYNE

Have you read the comments?

MILES

Online? Nope. Not after that first day. Despite best efforts to calcify it, my heart remains fragile. Reading that shit would end me.

Dwayne french-inhales a large puff of smoke. The white ropes hug his nostrils on the inhale and he leans back into his chair to savour the sensation. Miles cracks his right shoulder to release tension.

MILES (CONT'D)

How bad?

Dwayne shakes his head.

DWAYNE

Usizisome. Kenyans are fucking ignorant.

MILES

They're just scared. And sheltered.

DWAYNE

No, they're mean. And Christian.

Dwayne rolls down his window to let some of the smoke out.

DWAYNE (CONT'D)
Are you talking to someone?

Miles shakes his head, no.

MILES
I haven't been back to therapy in months. After this is done, maybe.

DWAYNE
Can I help? Let me help.

MILES
Can you mark 60 shitty first-year essays by tomorrow afternoon?

Dwayne coughs out in laughter. Miles takes another puff.

MILES (CONT'D)
I'm good for now, but...thank you.

Silence. They look at each other and chuckle.

MILES (CONT'D)
So. Tomorrow? How are you feeling?

DWAYNE
Tomorrow?

Silence. Miles looks at Dwayne - unwilling to help him remember.

MILES
Tomorrow.

DWAYNE (CONT'D)
Oh fuck - yes. Tomorrow.

Dwayne breaks into a cackle.

DWAYNE (CONT'D)
Woi. I had really forgotten about that. I need to cut back, yeah?

He puts out the roach on the serviette.

MILES
Excited to be a free bitch?

DWAYNE
Is that optimism I detect in your voice? You should go to more funerals.

MILES
That sounds wrong.

Moonie suddenly forces the vehicle door open.

MOONIE

Wewe!

Dwayne and Miles are startled.

MILES

Fuck me.

DWAYNE

Jesus--

MOONIE

So you've come to waste your life
on the *drogas*?

DWAYNE

This is the best use of my time
right now--

MOONIE

We can all smell what you're doing
from those ugly tents. Why don't
people like nice things? I really
struggle with the concept of ugly
things.

Dwayne offers him a newly lit joint. Moonie hesitates.

DWAYNE

Your sobriety is an affront to my
personhood.

MILES

It's very inconvenient, *tbh*.

MOONIE

Enablers - *hebu...*

Moonie grabs the blunt and inhales.

MOONIE (CONT'D)

Mnaogea? Tea tea tea!

MILES

The ruling tomorrow.

MOONIE

It's not happening.

Moonie coughs mid-inhale.

DWAYNE

You're fucking with my buzz.

MILES

The argument is on our side. It's happening.

Moonie takes another long drag. He holds it in for a moment.

MOONIE

They postponed it twice--

DWAYNE

That doesn't mean anything.

MOONIE

It doesn't not, not mean something though, right?

Moonie sinks into the back of his chair. Miles grabs the joint before he lands.

MILES

Okay, give me that. Lightweight.

MOONIE

In fact, just - *Shika*.

Moonie hands Miles an envelope.

MOONIE (CONT'D)

We all chipped in--

MILES

I told y'all, I'm good--

MOONIE

Ah ah! We're not doing that--

DWAYNE

I don't know why you think you have choices here--

Miles lunges at the two men and attempts to give them an awkward three-way hug.

MOONIE

This is cute but weed is one of the two things that really get me horned up so just be knowing.

Moonie peels himself off of the mosh.

DWAYNE

What's the other thing?

Mid smoke:

MOONIE
Funerals.

DWAYNE
I knew it--

MILES
Get out--

MOONIE
I will not be kink-shamed by
delusional homosexuals.

The warm laughter from the vehicle carries into the sky.

INT. MASENO HOUSE - KITCHEN AREA - DAY

Miles, wonderfully stoned, waddles into the kitchen. He makes a beeline for the fridge but he doesn't make it far before Lo springs from her pot, furious.

LO
Do they want me to chase the goat,
kill it, skin it, cut it up, cook
it and serve it with these- one,
two - hands? Because I'll do it. Do
they think I wont?

Miles balances himself against one of the counters and tries to keep up with Lo's words.

MILES
I believe you--

LO
I've done it before. You've seen me
do it--

MILES
I've seen you do it.

Maria, who is standing behind Lo, moves to a large simmering pot on the fire and lifts the lid off.

LO
So why is it taking them-- Maria
Mungu one, I will break those hands
off and beat you with them if you
touch that lid again.

MILES
Okay, come.

Miles moves to action and gently pushes Lo towards a thick wooden bench propped against the kitchen door. Lo is resistant.

LO
Baba, I don't have time - MARIA.

MILES
Come, please. Just Over here.

Lo takes a seat. Miles kneads her neck with the base of his knuckles. Lo melts.

MILES (CONT'D)
Maria can you please get me some water?

Maria stares up at Miles, confused.

MILES (CONT'D)
To drink. Water to drink.

Maria lights up and bolts off to get water.

LO
Where did you learn how to do this?

MILES
Whoring.

Lo laughs for the first time in days. It fills the room. The other ladies watch in amusement. Lo tries to get up.

LO
I have to--

MILES
Just relax. 5 minutes. That's all. You'll be up and yelling at the ladies in a few.

Lo relaxes into Mile's hands again.

MILES (CONT'D)
Why is it so quiet in here? Where's the radio?

AGNES
Polo took it to the shed.

LO
That boy is stupid--

MILES
Okay. I'll ask Alex to bring--

One of the ladies breaks into song. The other ladies join in. The harmonies kick in.

The play off the sounds in the kitchen and the beautiful voices lift the room. Lo is enjoying every moment of it.

MILES (CONT'D)

I'll go check on the boys.

Lo nods. Miles leaves the room, singing along. Smiling. He bumps into Maria walking back in with a bottle of sparkling water. Maria, with a smile, hands it to Lo who stares at her.

LO

Did you get this from the Rweya's?
You want those witches to come in
here and accuse me of stealing?

Maria is confused and doesn't understand what she did wrong.

EXT. MASENO HOUSE - MAKESHIFT ABATOIRE - DAY

Miles heads towards the wooden shed - following the music and laughter. He walks past the edge of ridge in the shed - passing livestock and bales of freshly cut nappier grass. He finds the men, Alex, Nathaniel, Polo and some of Polo's boys, performing heteronormative camaraderie and pointless babble in the abatoire section of the shed. The space reeks of dried animal blood and cheap beer.

Alex, seated by the edge of the group, has his shirt off. Nathaniel is stood behind him, inspecting something on the boy's back. Nathaniel gently brushes his fingers over Alex's skin.

MILES

What are you doing?

Alex is startled. He struggles to put his shirt back on.

ALEX

Nate--

MILES

Nate?

ALEX

Nathaniel, sorry.

NATHANIEL

I was just showing him where he
should get a tattoo.

MILES

You don't like tattoos.

Nathaniel; roles up his sleeve and reveals a massive tattoo of a nondescript forest tableau.

NATHANIEL
I caught the bug again.

Miles says nothing - remaining expressionless.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)
Alex wants to get one along his ribcage. Please tell him how much that hurts.

ALEX
Oh, you have one?

Silence.

NATHANIEL
He does. I used to hate it.

Polo tunes in to the conversation.

POLO
Are we talking tattoos? I don't know why I haven't gotten one yet.

Miles points at the dead goat in a basin, waiting to be strung up.

MILES
The kitchen has been waiting for meat for a while now. Lo needs you to hurry up?

Polo ignores him and addresses Nathaniel, lifting his wrist into the air.

POLO
What about right here? Will that hurt? I've been told it hurts--

NATHANIEL
Polo, big guy. Are you scared of a needle?

POLO
Cheza chini budda. It's just a question.

NATHANIEL
No no, it's fine if you're scared. Do you want Alex over here to hold your hand?

Nathaniel winks at Alex and playfully taps his shoulder. Alex smiles - shy. Miles notices.

POLO

Wacha hizo, Boss. I can handle a needle just fine--

NATHANIEL

Didn't sound like you could.

Alex snickers. He looks up and is met with Miles' fiery gaze. His smile falls.

POLO

Alekie, get me another beer.

Alex jumps up to go get a beer from the bucket in the corner of the shed. Polo turns to Miles.

POLO (CONT'D)

Do you want one?

Polo looks at Miles waiting for an answer. Miles remains quiet.

POLO (CONT'D)

Look, *si kwa ubaya* but if you're in such a hurry, *si* carry it yourself.

Polo breaks into laughter - turning to his boys for affirmation. They laugh with him. Miles turns to leave. Polo looks down - a brief moment of shame wraps itself around his face. He inhales sharply and takes a swig of his beer.

POLO (CONT'D)

Tell the kitchen it will come when it comes. I'm not going to be rushed by women.

Miles stops, inhales deeply and spins around. He looks at the meat, then up again at the boys. Without a word, he goes over to the bleeding goat and lifts it by its hind legs.

NATHANIEL

Miles--

POLO

Leave him.

Miles throws the bleeding carcass across his back. His shirt and suit immediately catch the deep red of the drying blood. It trickles down his back, into his shoes and onto the ground.

ALEX
Let me help--

MILES
Get dressed.

Miles adjusts the meat on his back and heads to the kitchen, the hot sun drying the blood on him.

INT/EXT. MASENO HOUSE - KITCHEN AREA - DAY

Miles, glass of water in hand, joins Lo on the steps outside of the kitchen. Lo brushes his jacket, inspecting it - wondering how to get the blood stains out.

LO
Do you have another one?

MILES
I'll find something in Major's closet. Old man had taste.

Miles fiddles with the dried blood on his shoes.

LO
You're just like him.

MILES
Major?

Lo nods yes. Miles smiles.

LO
Stubborn.

Lo takes a sip of water from Miles' glass.

MILES
I'm not sure I'm ready to think about him not being here. What does that even look like?

He looks up, then straight ahead and rests in the quiet.

LO
What?

MILES
Life without him?

LO
A little different. A little...

MILES

Less than.

LO

A little less than.

Lo thinks about it for a moment and snickers.

LO (CONT'D)

Hmm. You really are a writer.

MILES

Mama Akinyi wants to know when it is I intend to get a 'real' job.

Lo lets out a hearty laugh.

LO

Did you tell her that, on top of writing for a national newspaper, you're also a fully fledged lecturer?

MILES

Adhoc. They pay me in conference assignments and hope.

LO

It is still very impressive.

MILES

I can show you pay stubs so you can cry with me.

LO

Then maybe explain to her that writing is--

MILES

A job I might not have tomorrow.

Silence.

MILES (CONT'D)

Did you read it?

Lo nods her head, 'yes'.

Miles empties the glass of water in a quick swig.

MILES (CONT'D)

I have three degrees, Lo. Three. Why do I need to explain anything? To anyone?

LO

I know. But its family. This just part of the burden we have to bear.

MILES

Fielding stupid questions?

LO

It's all they know how to ask. They mean well. Most times.

Miles notices the tonal shift in her voice.

MILES

Did he read it?

LO

I'm not sure. Those last days went by so quickly--

Lo balances tears.

LO (CONT'D)

He was there. He was getting better. Then he wasn't.

She fixes her head wrap even though it doesn't need it.

LO (CONT'D)

You know, he never questioned me? In all the time I've known him. Worked for him. Not once.

MILES

I know she's sick but I hate that *Dani* still calls you by that name. And Anyang' takes pleasure in it.

LO

That one has a small penis. Imagine I'm okay. Major didn't correct people when they used my dead name either.

MILES

Did that bother you?

LO

I told that old Military Captain who I was - long before any of this became news and he believed me. Immediately. Like none of this was foreign to him even when it didn't completely make sense to me.

She clears her throat to stop herself from crying.

LO (CONT'D)

He believed me. That was enough.

Polo appears from behind them. Miles and Lo glare at him.

POLO

I came to apologise.

Lo gets up to walk into the kitchen.

LO

I heard you don't like to be rushed
by women.

She disappears into the house. Polo stands there in shame.
Miles looks back at the blood on his shoes.

EXT. MASENO HOUSE - FRONT YARD - DAY

As the sun begins to set, the compound slowly comes alive. Everyone splits into various factions. The rowdy aunts and the gays find common ground. The Nairobi cousins are hurdled around the only external plug point - trying to charge their phones. The drunks and elders continue to show that very little separates them. The professional mourners hang by the coffin, watching as people come up to have full conversations with Major's body. The conversations about the repeal of the law criminalizing homosexuality punctuate the air.

MAN 1

The thing about this is that we're
not ready as a nation to talk about
it.

MAN 2

There's nothing to talk about. It's
a crime. Why are we trying to
change the law.

MAN 1

Aki hawa watoto. There's no
discipline. Did you see what *Kijana*
wa Cathy aliandika?

MAN 3

There's no god in their lives. We
really need to pray for them.

A large fire is lit at the center of the compound. The drunks begin to play drums - calling for Major's spirit to grant them blessings from the afterlife.

We get to hear how ill-informed even the most progressive relatives are about homosexuality.

Cathy comes up from behind Miles and offers him a cup of tea. She sits next to him. He stares at the cup for a while, not drinking from it.

CATHY
What's wrong?

MILES
I'm lactose intolerant, mum.

CATHY
Since when?

MILES
Since always.

CATHY
Even when I was giving you breast milk?

MILES
Probably.

CATHY
You love to complicate things sometimes...

Cathy pushes to try and get up.

CATHY (CONT'D)
Sawa, I'll go make you another one--

MILES
Mum. Sit.

He places the cup down by his side. They watch the people around them in silence.

CATHY
Your grandmother is looking for Daddy's journals.

MILES
They're in the study. I think.

CATHY
Are you okay?

Miles nods his head 'yes'.

A quiet lingers for an uncomfortable amount of time. Neither of them look at one another. Miles gets up and brushes his pants clean with his free hand. He stares at the fire and places the cup of tea down.

CATHY (CONT'D)

Your aunty is looking for you. You missed the daily devotion meeting at church.

MILES

I was never going--

CATHY

But you told them you were.

MILES

I lied.

CATHY

That you got from your father.

MILES

Probably. I'll go find those journals.

Miles leaves. Cathy doesn't look at him - her gaze continues to hold on the dancing crowds

INT. MASENO HOUSE - MAJOR'S STUDY - NIGHT

Miles walks into the study to find his grandmother struggling to reach a book.

MILES

Dani why do you want to break yourself?.

DANI

Anyang' wants me to find something to read tomorrow--

MILES

And he couldn't help you?

Miles stretches out and grabs the book of poems.

DANI

We know which side of the family you got your height from.

MILES

My height and a penchant for lying
apparently. I love this book.

He hands *Dani* the book and goes over to his grandfather's desk to look around.

MILES (CONT'D)

Have you eaten?

DANI

None of that, please. *Woi*. I've
been getting that from everyone
today.

MILES

Ignore Angang'. He needs to worry
more about his receding hairline.

DANI

Did he make comments about that
nest on your head?

Miles tries to withhold a deep sigh. Dani chuckles.

DANI (CONT'D)

I love it.

Miles visibly relaxes. He smiles.

DANI (CONT'D)

I going to use something from his
journals.

MILES

I think I left them here. Hold on.

Miles pulls out some drawers and unexpectedly spots his old, newspaper-covered diary. Still bound. Still a little torn. He touches it gently.

[FLASHBACK 2005] INT. MASENO HOUSE - MAJOR'S STUDY - NIGHT

Young Miles is hidden behind his grandfather's desk - puffy-eyed and wrapped in a full panic. He frantically goes through his diaries - ripping whole pages out and crushing them into small balls. From outside the study he hears loud yelling and fighting. A much younger looking version of Cathy walks into the study; frazzled.

Miles jumps from underneath the desk and looks at his mother pleadingly.

MILES

I'm sorry--

CATHY

What did you do?

Miles starts crying again. Cathy notices the pages and books. She hardens up.

CATHY (CONT'D)

He wants you to bring those books
with you.

Miles walks out - as though sentenced to the gallows.

[PRESENT DAY] EXT. MASENO HOUSE - FRONT YARD - NIGHT

The gays and the Aunties , having become fast friends, are gathered near a gloriously wild bonfire.

MOONIE

That's such a long story, woi.

DWAYNE

Where did we actually meet?

Miles is walking to the gravesite when they stop him and summon him over.

GEORGIE

Actually, it's good you've come,
just bring yourself over here. *Kuna
maswali.*

MANO

Just come *hi-ja.*

Miles reluctantly stands by one of the tent's pillars.

EDDY

Mutual friends.

DWAYNE

Being hookers.

MOONIE

That one even! Eddy and I met at
Church.

AUNTY 1

Oh? Which one do you go to?

They all snicker.

DWAYNE

That's not--Uhm.

MILES

'Church' is a club, Aunty. Gypsy.
Saturday night to Sunday morning.

MOONIE

So when you bump into people you
know in the morning--

AUNTY 2

You can tell them you've come from
church? Brilliant!

The Aunties burst into more laughter as they throw high-fives around. Across from them are the homesteads' men. The bitter bunch drink their beer through long straws stemming from large gourds. They quietly watch, fuming at the beautiful spectacle being created by the joyful matching of queer men and drunk aunties.

DWAYNE

Early Bird service. But to answer
your question - NPC, Karen.

AUNTY 3

Really? Is Pastor White still
there?

DWAYNE

That one scammed the congregation
out of millions and ran back to
Australia.

Dwayne points and Miles and Gorgie.

DWAYNE (CONT'D)

These two met on tour.

GEORGIE

We were peddling our wares for the
whites in Holland.

Miles takes a seat on the grass, laughing.

AUNTY 1

Ati?

MILES

We were on a pseudo-racist cabaret
show that toured through parts of
Europe.

GEORGIE

But we were primarily based in
Holland.

AUNTY 2

Your mother said something about
this years ago.

Miles nods 'yes'. The other aunties remain puzzled.

AUNTY 3

Ile ya Canada?

AUNTY 2

Holland, my dear. Netherlands.
Where they took *watu wa* Post
Election Violence.

AUNTY 3

Oh, the Hague?

MILES

That was one of the cities we
performed in, yes.

George adjusts in his seat, going for his phone.

GEORGIE

We stayed in the middle of nowhere
though.

MILES

Epe.

GORGIE

Epe.

MILES (CONT'D)

The dutch bible belt. So wild.

George hands the phone to the aunties. It's a picture of
their tour poster.

AUNTY 2

This looks so nice. Very
professional.

AUNTY 1

You know my girl wanted her
honeymoon to be in Amsterdam. In
the end, Bora Bora just showed more
promise.

MOONIE

So me I have questions for y'all.
What was *Baba Nani* over here like
as a child?

Miles hides his face in his hands.

MILES

Aki, I knew it. This was a trap.

EDDY

Moonie you're so messy. I live!

The aunties sit up, half-chuckling.

AUNTY 1

Oh, this one? This one? *Woi!*

AUNTY 2

Weh weh weh--

MILES

Please don't tell him anything. It
will be used against me.

Dwayne claps his hands excitedly.

DWAYNE

Messy messy messy! *Un-ti-dy!*

MOONIE

Me I'm just asking relevant
questions, yeah?

MANO

Oh, no I fully support it.

MILES

Traitor!

Mano adjusts to sit forward.

AUNTY 1

I've never met a naughtier child.

MOONIE

Knew it.

EDDY

Called it!

DWAYNE

Why does that not surprise me?

AUNTY 3

Do you remember that time he threw
the sufuria over the fence?

Eddy cocks his head to look directly at Miles, who buries
himself even deeper into his chest.

EDDY
Exchuuuse please? Whose fence?

AUNTY 3
 Theirs! Over to the neighbours'?

MOONIE
 I have so many questions--

OLIVER
 So many--

AUNTY 2
 What had you done to it? You had
 done something to it. I can't
 remember.

Miles hesitates, looks around and cracks a smile.

MILES
 I had burnt milk in it.

MOONIE
 None of the many question I have
 are being answered.

MILES
 I forgot the milk on the gas. It
 burnt into the sufuria. Black. Like
 charcoal. It was quite beautiful
 actually--

Eddy waves his hands to stop Miles.

EDDY
 Okay, before we discuss aesthetics,
 how old were you and where had you
 gone for the milk to burn black?

Moonie swings to look at Eddy.

MOONIE
 Oh, so now you're invested in my
ngonyo storos?

EDDY
 D'yknow what? Calm down yeah? *Enhe*?

MILES
 11. Maybe 12. I hadn't gone
 anywhere. I was watching TV and I
 just forgot it.

OLIVER

Aki, let me tell you - kids will really burn your house down for some *Ed, Edd and Eddy* re-runs.

The gang burst into rowdy laughter. Miles' spirits begin to lift. He gets excited about telling the story.

MILES

Then smoke started billowing into the living room. I opened all the windows, used my pocket-money to buy air freshener and threw the evidence as far as I could.

MANO

Which was your neighbours' back yard?

MILES

Yep.

EDDY

So what we're saying is that kids are stupid.

MILES

Yep.

DWAYNE

How did your mum find out?

MILES

Oh, she could smell the smoke from the bus-top. The second she walked into the house, she knew. I was so convinced I had gotten rid of the smell. But I guess if you stand in it long enough- it gets hard to tell the difference.

Moonie's hand shoots up dramatically. He uses his free hand to point to it.

MOONIE

Teacher, pick me. Thanks. So why is your mother not currently in prison?

The aunties continue to laugh. Miles' smile struggles to stay on.

EDDY

Because *meeee* - I'd just give you the phone and ask you to call the police to come arrest me preemptively.

AUNTY 1

Alichapwa! Weh!

AUNTY 3

He was beaten a *gooood* one!

Miles looks around at the gang cackling in bliss and amusement. He tries to croak out a laugh as well but air keeps getting trapped in his throat.

AUNTY 2

Cathy really doesn't play.

AUNTY 3

This was after your father had left, right?

Miles looks up at his Aunt and nods.

[FLASHBACK 2005] INT. MASENO HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A young Miles (12) is sat naked on the floor across from Cathy and his belt-wielding father. The boy is dry heaving and his eyes are swollen from crying. Philemon, seated in major's 'special' chair glares in uncontrollable fury at his son. His eyes are bloodshot. Cathy holds herself in a tight embrace to keep from shaking.

PHILEMON

What is this filth?

Miles snuffles but says nothing: not of a lack for trying.

PHILEMON (CONT'D)

I will stick this entire foot into your mouth and kick the words out.

MILES

In school we were--

PHILEMON

Please think before you finish that sentence. I can call your teachers right now.

Miles struggles to get the words out. His throat constricts. Cathy looks at Miles - naked and rolled into a ball of fear. Tears well up in her eyes but she doesn't move a muscle.

PHILEMON (CONT'D)

I told you not to get him those books, Yes? I said he's too young--

Philemon reclines in his chair. Wiping the spit from across his mouth. Cathy lifts the pages in his diaries and shows them to Miles. He looks away.

CATHY

Baba, why were you writing this?

MILES

Mum I'm sorry, please--

Philemon sits forward, startling Miles, who continues to fold into himself.

PHILEMON

Is this what he's being taught in those expensive schools? Is this what I'm paying for, Catherine?

MILES

I'm sorry. I'm sorr--

PHILEMON

Give me that --

Philemon viciously grabs the book from Cathy and reads.

PHILEMON (CONT'D)

"Mr Omindi interrupts me. He steps forward until he is within inches of me. He brings his mouth to my ear. My body throbs--"

Miles whines involuntarily.

PHILEMON (CONT'D)

What is this garbage? This what your grandfather lets you write, yes?

Cathy swings around and raises her hand to Philemon's face.

CATHY

Leave Daddy out of it, Philemon.

Philemon slaps the hand out of his face and stands up.

PHILEMON
Cathy, this is satanic!

CATHY
You're not helping him--

PHILEMON
The boy is writing smut! Homosexual smut!
(to Miles)
Are you a homosexual? Is that what this is? You're a homosexual, yes?

Miles squeals as Philemon approaches him. He tries to get up but all his limbs fail him.

MILES
No.

Philemon strikes Miles across his back with the belt. The child's skin immediately develops a welt.

PHILEMON
Are you a homosexual Miles?

Miles screams. Cathy looks away. Philemon continues to strike him indiscriminately with the belt: each lash leaving an indelible mark.

MILES
(screaming)
No daddy.

PHILEMON
Then what is this? What is this?

MILES
Daddy, I'm sorry.

Philemon lowers the belt repeatedly onto Miles' exposed body. Each strike carrying the full force and strength of an adult male. Miles' loud wails begin to taper off as his strength leaves him.

In the midsts of Philemon's assault, Major bursts into the living room. He drops his car keys and lunges at Philemon, striking him on the mouth with a swift and effective punch. Philemon, stunned, falls backwards. Cathy screams. Miles rolls around on the floor dry heaving, unable to make a sound. Major rips the seat covers off of one of the seats and covers Miles. He helps the boy up. Philemon, still on the floor sits up and assesses his injuries.

Philemon gets up and turns towards Miles, trying to grab him.

CATHY
Philemon stop--

PHILEMON
He is my son! Mine!

Before Philemon can reach Miles, Major grabs the long rubber whip that's ornately placed against the wall and strikes at him. Philemon loses his balance and falls back a few steps by accident. The glide of Major's whip that was aimed at Philemon's chest narrowly misses him and strikes a door, ripping through layers of paint upon impact. Philemon understanding his luck, hangs back

MAJOR
You will not touch this boy again.
Out.

Philemon tries to hide it, but he is startled.

CATHY
Baba--

MAJOR
TOKA.

Cathy goes to speak but abandons the effort.

MAJOR (CONT'D)
Don't come back into this house
until you remember that you are a
mother.

Cathy storms out of the room, crying loudly. Philemon shuffles, trying to compose himself. He glares at Miles.

[PRESENT DAY] EXT. MASENO HOUSE - FRONT YARD - NIGHT

Miles snaps back to the conversation with Eddy's dramatic clapping.

MANO
Is this why you're lactose
intolerant? PTSD?

Miles takes a while to catch up with the conversation. They all look at him, awaiting a response.

MILES
Among other things, yes.

AUNTY 3

That wasn't even the craziest story.

MILES

I'm so concerned--

AUNTY 3

When he was in class 6, Milo was brought to school just down the road from here?

MILES

Oh sweet, Jesus.

DWAYNE

Maseno?

Miles shakes his head 'no'.

MILES

Worse. *Mudasa.*

DWAYNE

Mudasa Academy? Where *akina* Wetangula and them bring their children? *Hebu*, just clap for your mother.

MOONIE

Context?

DWAYNE

It's the *ISK* of Western Kenya. Fancy AF.

Moonie snaps his fingers in support.

AUNTY 2

And very expensive too. All my children went there.

AUNTY 3

So this one decided that he was going to run away from school and come here to his grandparents'.

Miles isn't having fun anymore. He attempts another half-baked smile but quits halfway into it.

MILES

Let's change the subject.

AUNTY 3
You don't want to tell them?

MOONIE
You can't not *maliza* the story
please. For our sanity.

MILES
I told them I had been kidnapped.

Miles stands up as everyone reacts to the information.

EDDY
I am soooo impressed.
Genuinely.

MOONIE
I'm sorry, what again?

DWAYNE
Makofi!

Dwayne and George clap.

GEORGIE
That creativity? That one you have
to be born with.

MOONIE
So then what happened?

MILES
I have to go--

Miles slowly backs away. The gang begin to protest.

MOONIE
Ah ah, now you--

DWAYNE
Don't be like that--

MILES
I was going somewhere before ya'll
interrupted me for this tea hunting
session.

EDDY
You're really going to leave us
hanging? Rude. But also, can I pre-
order your memoirs? Because you're
a mess and I love it.

MILES
Aunty *Meeky* will fill you guys in.

Miles powers out of the compound, the heat of the night
matching the temperature of his tears.

EXT. GRAVESITE - NIGHT

Absalom is digging the grave alone. He spots Miles walking towards him, without missing a beat or halting the action of his shovelling:

ABSALOM
Under the jacket.

Miles looks around and spots Absalom's jacket under a tree. He finds his grandfather's journals nestled neatly within the lining.

MILES
Life saver.

Absalom continues to dig. The light fall-off from the security lights form a halo around his glistening body. Miles notices that the site has been moved to the spot his grandfather had initially requested to be buried in.

MILES (CONT'D)
I thought...Did Anyang', uhm?

Absalom heaves up from the hole and sighs heavily.

ABSALOM
Polo.

MILES
Hmm. I wonder how he pulled that off.

The remark is snide. Absalom continues to dig, ignoring Miles.

MILES (CONT'D)
Where are the others?

ABSALOM
They left.

MILES
Are they worried that Major's spirit will haunt them if they disobeyed the almighty elders?

Absalom gazes at him, waiting for Miles to figure it out.

MILES (CONT'D)
Wait, really?

Miles chuckles cruelly. Absalom goes back to digging.

MILES (CONT'D)

What are they, 12?

Absalom stops digging again, frustrated this time. He doesn't look up.

ABSALOM

They believe in something. It matters.

He continues to dig.

MILES

How many of these have you dug?

ABSALOM

Enough of them.

MILES

It doesn't get to you?

ABSALOM

What? The work?

MILES

Death?

Absalom stops digging and looks up at Miles for the first time.

ABSALOM

I need to finish.

Absalom continues digging. Miles spots a pile of shovels on the side, grabs one, takes off his sweater, rolls up his shirt and jumps into the grave. He shovels dirt out.

EXT. GRAVESITE - NIGHT

Absalom and Miles are lying in the grass, staring up at the sky, smoking a blunt. Very *Fault in Our Stars* without the terminal cancer and teenage angst. Absalom passes the blunt back to Miles.

MILES

I'm trying to write more. In these.

Miles lifts up his grandfather's journals.

MILES (CONT'D)

On paper. He wrote everything down on paper.

(MORE)

MILES (CONT'D)

Mum bought him his first computer years ago. He used it to play solitaire.

They laugh.

MILES (CONT'D)

I haven't looked at my own computer in a while.

Silence carries for a moment.

ABSALOM

I enjoyed the article. Brave.

Miles stares at him. Absalom stares back.

ABSALOM (CONT'D)

What?

MILES

Nothing. I'm just parking my prejudices a little.

ABSALOM

Wise.

MILES

I thought I'd have time to prepare for it. I honestly never thought it would happen - that they'd actually print it. I get asked for a version of this article every couple of years. It never makes it past the first editor. Then the case happened and I got the green-light and everything just...a mile a minute.

Miles takes the blunt and inhales.

ABSALOM

How do you prepare for that kind of bullshit?

MILES

You curse. I like it. The hate was always going to come. I buckled in. You prepare by committing to the safest version of complete delusion.

ABSALOM

Did it work?

MILES

For a bit, yes. Then Major died.

Absalom puts out the spliff and switches to a cigarette. He offers Miles one: he takes it. Absalom lights it.

MILES (CONT'D)

And suddenly the embarkment wasn't strong enough. It broke. It broke and it all came in. All of it. Every vitriol filled comment. Every religious argument and subsequent banishment to eternal damnation. Every *fago, shoga, malaya*...It all flooded in. It had only been out for a day and already...Fuck, did it sting.

With a chuckle, Miles rolls closer to Absalom and re-lights the joint.

ABSALOM

How often do you smoke?

MILES

More and more recently. There was a time I was convinced my soul would atrophy the moment I touched it. I'm not sure it hasn't. You?

ABSALOM

My wife doesn't like it.

Miles coughs on the smoke as he inhales. Absalom smirks. Miles gathers his composure and attempts to roll with it.

MILES

How long have you been married?

ABSALOM

Long enough.

Absalom sits up. It's a bit of a struggle.

ABSALOM (CONT'D)

I moved here a few years ago to help her family with the farm.

MILES

So is grave-digging just a fun hobby?

ABSALOM

It's money.

Miles offers the blunt to Absalom.

MILES

Of course. Maseno doesn't exactly have a diverse portfolio of job offerings.

Absalom waves it back.

ABSALOM

You hate it here that much?

Miles sits up too, crossing his feet atop each other.

MILES

I love it here. I dream of this place constantly--

ABSALOM

You dream of *that* fancy house.

Absalom points at the main house. Miles takes a long inhale and looks at Absalom for an extended period. He cracks a facetious smile.

MILES

I don't think you know me as well as you think you do...

ABSALOM

I know you don't like this place. Not really. You hate the tradition, the ceremony--

MILES

I saw a woman throw herself on the ground - in front of a car. Holding a partially eaten chicken wing. I'm not allowed to be slightly cynical of that entire scene?

Absalom mulls over the question for a moment. He shakes his head.

ABSALOM

That woman is apart of it. Maybe what she does can be seen as funny, but... sometimes it's what you do when you're apart of something. She's apart of something.

MILES

And I'm not?

ABSALOM
Do you want to be?

MILES
They don't want me.

He motions from Miles to pass him the blunt. Time passes between them. Absalom lights it again. He takes an inhale. He loads deep and lets the smoke slide out.

ABSALOM
How is that any of your business?

He takes a huge inhale.

EXT. MASENO HOUSE - FRONT YARD - NIGHT

Miles is standing by the gate of the compound, watching the entire place. His friends are dancing by the fire. Lo has joined them. The men across from them are livid. The aunties join the gays. Miles watches as some of the men move to stand up and stop it, but Polo diffuses the potential threat and the tension.

He pushes on, walking towards the house. His father springs up from the cabal of men and intercepts him.

PHILEMON
My boy, come here. Come here let me-
-Alex? Alex?

Alex appears from nowhere eating a piece of watermelon.

PHILEMON (CONT'D)
Alex get my boy, my man over here,
get him a Pilsner, yes? Is Pilsner
okay?

Miles backs away from him. He can smell the brewery running through his father's bloodstream.

MILES
I'm just going to get cleaned up--

PHILEMON
Nooo- come sit with your father.
Where are your friends? Tell them
they must come sit with the men.

Philemon breaks into a sardonic laughter. He grabs Miles in a rather abrupt fashion.

MILES

Phil, I've got to--

PHILEMON

Phil? *Pil Ndi* bwa? Who are you calling Phil?

Philemon pushes him away. He gets louder.

PHILEMON (CONT'D)

So you're not talking. Are you seeing this? He's calling me Phil?
Nikama mimi ni dogi yake, sindio?

He turns his attention back to Miles. Moving closer and smacking the journals out of his hands. Miles is visibly exhausted and doesn't want to engage. He Picks the journals up and dusts them, off. Everyone is now looking at them.

PHILEMON (CONT'D)

You think you're a big *big* man now?
You think you're a man?

Nathaniel shows up and stands between them. Miles shakes his head in disbelief.

NATHANIEL

Philemon--

PHILEMON

No *no* - *siku hizi ni* Phil, yes?
Phil the demon. The one who beat you like a dog, *sindio*? That's what you wrote? *Takataka!*

NATHANIEL

Please.

Philemon tries to go for Miles again. Miles steps back and Nathaniel carries Philemon's weight. He helps him stand up straight.

PHILEMON

Huyu has gone to tell the world what a garbage father I am. *Anaita babaake* Phil. Phil is who? Who is Phil? Bloody fucking. I am your father.

NATHANIEL

Okay. Enough. Come--

Nathaniel walks him into the house.

PHILEMON

Phil. *Kwenda!* Go cry tears of milk
we make tea. *Ghasia--*

Miles stands there. At the center. Eyes on him.

EXT. MASENO HOUSE - SATELLITE DISH STAND - NIGHT

Miles is seated under the satellite dish, listening to the women in the kitchen sing as they clean up. He fiddles with the journals in his hand, but he never opens them. Nathaniel comes up from behind him. Miles turns to see who it is and then turns back to look out into the mountains.

MILES

You didn't have to do that--

Nathaniel exhales loudly.

MILES (CONT'D)

Thank you. I'm trying to say Thank
you--

NATHANIEL

How have you been?

MILES

Do we need to do this?

NATHANIEL

Okay, then--

Nathaniel is walking away.

MILES

Wait. Wait, I'm sorry.

He turns back and takes a seat next to Miles.

NATHANIEL

The place really hasn't changed
much.

MILES

Mhm. It's everyone's favorite time
capsule.

NATHANIEL

It still smells the same. Vanilla
and starch. It must be good to be
back here.

Miles looks at him, his face crunched up. Nathaniel chuckles. There's a warmth between them.

MILES
We're at a funeral.

NATHANIEL
I mean, back - y'know, home.

MILES
Mmh. Home.

Miles sighs audibly.

NATHANIEL
What? What do you have against the concept of home?

MILES
Nobody wants me here.

NATHANIEL
You put a hit piece out on them.

Miles sniggers and walks a few steps away from Nathaniel.

MILES
I was just sharing my story .

NATHANIEL
Miles, they *were* your story--

MILES
It was important--

NATHANIEL
I'm not saying it wasn't. They're just going to need time. This is still your home.

Nathaniel closes the gap. He feels imposing but soft.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)
Home is any place that makes you forget the world is on fire.

MILES
Who said that?

NATHANIEL
Me. Just now.

MILES

Would you like me to pretend I believe that?

NATHANIEL

Yes, I'd like that very much.

They both laugh. The distance between them crumbles. Miles is genuinely smiling.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)

You look good.

The smile starts to fade. Miles looks straight ahead. His phone rings.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)

Look, Miles--

Miles waves the phone.

MILES

Victoria.

NATHANIEL

Is she going to punch me again?

MILES

She did say, on sight--

NATHANIEL

On sight, yes I remember.

They stare at each other for a moment after Miles gets up. He walks away, but looks back at Nathaniel's frame under the satellite dish.

EXT. MASENO HOUSE - YARD - NIGHT

Victoria and Alex are flipping through pages on their clipboards outside the tent area.

VICTORIA

Mama Omondi and Agnes have a room, yes?

ALEX

At Trufosa's

VICTORIA

Perfect. Did you remember to put the Rweyas by the cowshed?

ALEX

Isn't that a little mean?

Victoria looks up from her pages.

VICTORIA

Did you notice how Akinyi called you everything but your actual name today?

ALEX

I'll have the cockerels moved close to their window early tomorrow morning.

VICTORIA

I like you, Alex. I really do. If you weren't 9 I'd date you in a heartbeat.

ALEX

(under his breath)

I'm 16.

Victoria moves towards another tent. Alex trails behind her. Dwayne comes up.

DWAYNE

Mami, our driver is here.

VICTORIA

Are you sure you don't want to sleep here? We can always put some sleeping bags in Miles' room.

DWAYNE

Have you seen the homosexuals we're traveling with? Them bitches is fancy.

Victoria throws her hands up in the air in mock shock.

VICTORIA

Alex, please go tell their driver that he doesn't have to drive back to Kisumu. I can get him a bed somewhere here.

Alex nods and runs in the direction of the vehicle. Dwayne hugs Victoria.

DWAYNE

Why are you this amazing?

VICTORIA
Childhood trauma for the most part.

DWAYNE
So, our boy. Is he Okay? I know he
tells your ass everything.

Victoria mulls over it for a moment.

VICTORIA
He's okay. As okay as he can be.

DWAYNE
I tried to get him to crack with
the good herb but - nothing.

VICTORIA
He's just holding it together for
the family. And he's paying for
most of this.

Victoria's phone pings. She has a look at it.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)
I have been summoned to go play a
game of cards with the cousins. I
hate those uptight bitches.

Dwayne looks around at the massive tents.

DWAYNE
Did *Baba Nani* win the jackpot and
not tell us? Or do writers and
adjunct lecturers make funeral-
sponsorship money?

VICTORIA
I hadn't thought about that. I know
he's got quite a bit saved up.

DWAYNE
So he's paying for this with his
savings? Is this man not going to
grad school next year? Can we
contribute?

VICTORIA
Anyone who offers gets smoke from
him. Speaking of which...

Dwayne laughs out loud.

DWAYNE
You know I've got you.

Dwayne takes out a rolled joint and passes it to Victoria.

VICTORIA
Marry me.

DWAYNE
The second you get a penis.

VICTORIA
I can buy one?

DWAYNE
I'm listening!

INT. MASENO HOUSE - POLO'S UNDERGROUND LAIR - NIGHT

Polo's room looks like an abandoned university party house. His clothes are piled against his half opened closet. Inside are a large collections of half used Cologne bottles lined up hazardously on a low shelf. Above them is a rack full of empty hangers and two old jackets.

ACHIENG' (O.S.)
Kickback--

POLO (O.S.)
Block.

A small stereo speaker, similar to the one in the kitchen, rings in the soothing sounds of *Benga* music. The songs compete with the sounds of cards hitting the table.

ANITA (O.S.)
Nataka spades.

MILE (O.S.)
Fuck.

POLO (O.S.)
Kadi.

VICTORIA (O.S.)
Already?

The room smells of tobacco, cheap whiskey and mould. Alex is seated on Polo's unmade bed, eating and flipping through an old car magazine. Polo, Anita, Achieng, Victoria and Miles are seated around a makeshift table at the edge of the room: fashioned from empty beer crates and sturdy cardboard. The gang are engaged in a card game: Kenyan style poker. Everyone's drinking, smoking and trying hard not to lose. Anita, wearing a cheeky grin turns to Miles.

ANITA

I made out with a woman last week.

MILES

Oh. That's...nice. Kickback.

Achieng' tosses her hands up in frustration as Miles throws a King of spades in the middle of the table. It falls in a pile of open cards. Anita picks up a card from the deck of free-agents closest to her.

ANITA

At the clubs. It was so soft.
Lesbians love me.

Victoria and Miles share a look. She chuckles.

VICTORIA

That's certainly the word on the street.

ANITA

Really?

Everyone looks at Anita. They are all immediately taken back by the sincerity on her face. A silences comes over the room: it lasts for about 10 seconds. They all struggle to stifle their laughter.

VICTORIA

Anita...I'm not in the ropes with the lesbian Mafia. Who's next?]

Anita scoffs at them.

POLO

Mimi. Shika.

Polo takes the large pile of open cards from the table and hands them to Alex. Alex awkwardly grabs and shuffles them. Polo puts down a card from his deck onto the table. He's followed by Achieng'. Then Victoria. Anita picks a card up and glances over at Victoria.

ANITA

You guys dated, right?

It takes Victoria a second to realize Anita is talking to Miles and her.

VICTORIA

Oh, us? Yeah. Mmh, wait. This feels like a trap.

Miles tunes into the conversation. The game still goes on.

ANITA
For a while right?

MILES
What's happening?

VICTORIA
Definitely a trap. Two years. *Kadi*.

Achieng quickly puts down a series of cards that spin the game around and penalize Victoria.

ACHIENG'
Kula hiyo kwanza. Just eat that
first--

POLO
How does that even work?

Anita places a card on the table.

ANITA
Nataka diamonds.

Polo drops a card.

POLO
One day you're into...and the next,
you just...*wanaume*?

Victoria counts out cards from the free-agent pile to add to her deck as per the penalty. She looks obviously vexed.

VICTORIA
Yes Polo, it works just like a
light switch. Stupid.

POLO
Wacha hizo--

Victoria, without looking up, sets down a combination of cards.

VICTORIA
Stop asking stupid questions -
kickback, kickback, hearts.

Polo puts his deck down and starts gesticulating wildly. The energy shifts rapidly into anger.

POLO
 He wanted a conversation,
 (To Miles)
 You wanted a conversation, right?

Miles stares at Polo, very taken aback.

VICTORIA
 Ask google. Foolish.

MILES
 You read my article...

Polo points a threatening finger at victoria.

POLO
Tutakosana--

MILES
 What do you want to know, Polo? How
 we have sex? Who the man and the
 woman is? What intrusive
 information about my personal life,
 that you no doubt feel entitled to,
 would you like to know?

Miles tosses his card in the pile. Polo goes quiet for a
 moment. He glares at Miles - caught somewhere between rage
 and embarrassment.

POLO
 You're not the only gay person I
 know. I have many, many gay friends-

VICTORIA
 Name two.

Polo ignores Victoria.

POLO
 You just happen to be the one who
 put our entire family on blast for
 being
 (makes air quotes)
 Homophobic.

MILES
 What the fuck is this...

POLO
 "The quiet uncle who just stood
 by"? Like everyone here wasn't
 being beaten, too?

Miles goes quiet.

POLO (CONT'D)
We're just being men. We're not
homophobic. Nobody here cares.

MILES
So why are we talking about it
then?

POLO
Because you dragged everyone here
into your shit. Everyone.

Silence. Everything stands still for a second. Alex extends his hand out awkwardly to pass the deck of newly-shuffled cards back onto the table. He is left hanging.

POLO (CONT'D)
Why does it matter?

Miles cracks into a vicious chuckle. The volumes in their voices are getting elevated.

MILES
Why does freedom matter?

POLO
Nobody has said you're not free--

MILES
The constitution literally says--

POLO
You know what I mean.

Miles' struggle to remain civil is becoming physically evident. Anita takes the cards from Alex who still has his hand out.

ANITA
Your friends are here, though.

ACHIENG'
And they're fun. Nobody is
bothering them.

VICTORIA
Because they're...fun?

Victoria sneers at Achieng'.

ACHIENG'
That's not what--

POLO

No gay has ever been prosecuted under this law. Not one.

VICTORIA

No *gay* has been protected either.

Victoria and Anita place their decks on the table. Alex starts to clear the bottles of alcohol away from the center of action.

POLO

If they get arrested,

MILES

They?

POLO

You. Them. They. Whatever. If they get arrested they're almost always released--

MILES

After having to bribe their way out of court? The legal system continues to dehumanise us. Are you hearing yourself? Have you ever been arrested or asked to pay a fine for kissing a woman in public?

POLO

If she's a prostitute, yes.

MILES

You mean sex workers?

VICTORIA

Where are you getting your very, very incorrect stats from?

Miles stands up and hind-kicks his chair away. He tosses his cards on the table in the same motion.

MILES (CONT'D)

I want conversations. Just not with you.

He walks out of the room. Polo turns to look at victoria who is now also standing. She walks to the door.

VICTORIA

Have you ever been useful for more than bringing people pain?

Victoria walks out. Polo carries no remorse on his face.

INT. MASENO HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Miles joins Cathy in the living room. They watch as one of the women continues a conversation with Major's corpse. He hands her a cup of tea.

MILES

How long has Aunty Agnes been
towering over him?

CATHY

Just under an hour. Thank you.

She sips the tea slowly.

CATHY (CONT'D)

It's like she's going for an award.
Who can mourn the longest.

Miles snickers, but catches himself.

MILES

Mother, that is not nice. True?
Maybe definitely. Nice? Not very.

CATHY

'Who's Sadder Now'.

MILES

Mum!

CATHY

'So You Think You Can Cry'.

Miles struggles to hold himself back. A louder cackle sneaks out.

MILES

Mum you're going to get me in
trouble.

CATHY

I saw what she did to that garlic
sauce. How much do you want to bet
she stuffed food in her bag.

MILES

Maiye, mum.

Miles' laughter rages across the living-room. He covers his mouth but it's too late. Everyone stares at him. Cathy remains mute.

MILES (CONT'D)

Now look. I've been eliminated from competition.

CATHY

Wait so what are the rules again?

MILES

I'm not sure but I'm certain 'no laughing' is one of them.

They remain silent.

CATHY

If I stare at him long enough, I swear I can see it. His chest rising. And dipping.

Miles says nothing.

CATHY (CONT'D)

Do you think he can hear her?

Miles inhales deeply and lets it out slowly.

MILES

No. Maybe. Yes. I'm pretty certain he can smell her though.

Cathy chuckles and exhales slowly. Some time goes by in the silence. He turns, mouth heavy with words.

MILES (CONT'D)

Mum?

CATHY

Mmh?

MILES

We haven't really talked about--

CATHY

Mm mmh.

Cathy gently shakes her head 'no'. She looks at Miles and smiles. Miles smiles too, understanding her quiet request. Silence falls between them for a while until:

CATHY (CONT'D)

'Kisumu's Got Talent' - funeral food edition.

MILES

Okay, I am done with you.

INT. MASENO HOUSE - MILES'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Miles emerges from the bathroom with dripping wet hair tied into delicate twists.

VICTORIA (O.S.)
How does coconut oil make it dry?

MILES
I just want to know which ancestor
I pissed off for them to make my
hair *reject* coconut oil.

He finishes off the last strand of twists. He tosses his towel on the bed where Victoria is laying, engrossed in her phone. She playfully throws the wet towel back. Miles crawls into the bed and snuggles up next to her.

MILES (CONT'D)
Do you want them to do your make-
up?

VICTORIA
Are you finally getting me my Fenty
wishlist?

Victoria spins around in excitement.

MILES
For your funeral.

VICTORIA
Rude. *Abeg*, please. I want to be
caked and baked.

Miles turns to look up at the ceiling. Victoria plays with his ear as he does so.

MILES
4 days. That's what you all get
when I die. 4 and then get rid of
me.

VICTORIA
I've had club hops that have lasted
longer than that. What if you get
murdered? Gruesomely? And I have to
go on TV to plead with the masses
for any tips to help find your
killer?

Miles turns to look at her - laughing.

MILES

What in the Netflix-limited-series...If I get killed here nobody is finding my killer.

Victoria twists her face to try and make it look serious.

VICTORIA

Baby, look at me. I need you to trust, and I can't stress this enough, the Kenyan justice system.

MILES

Points for trying to say that with a straight face. I've touched too many penises for them to give a fuck.

VICTORIA

Can't relate.

MILES

Who is forcing you to lie?

They stare at each other trying to figure out which parts of what they were talking about were true. Victoria turns to look at her phone again.

VICTORIA

What happens after 4 days?

MILES

I don't care.

VICTORIA

You have to care.

MILES

Why did you forgive me?

VICTORIA

Wait, what? Did you just flip the topic on me?

MILES

I did. I also lied to you for years and hurt you. Yet you forgave me. Why?

Victoria turns to face Miles, swinging her phone across his back to bring him closer.

VICTORIA

Are you fishing?

Miles stares at her earnestly.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)
 Oh. You're really asking? Okay.
 Will, "...you're worth it,"
 suffice?

Miles shakes his head 'no'. Victoria turns to look up at the ceiling. Miles pushes in closer.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)
 You want me to say it. I think it's
 unfair that you're making me say
 it.

MILES
 You say it all the time.

VICTORIA
 This is different.

Miles gently rubs her neck.

MILES
 It is.

VICTORIA
 You are the love of my life...

MILES
 Vicky--

VICTORIA
 Calm down. My life contains
 multitudes but right now, you are
 the love of my life. And, one day,
 someone will come and knock you out
 of first place. And we'll both let
 him. Because you love me. And
 you're here as I figure out how to
 love myself. He will also be very,
 very gorgeous.

MILES
 You are the love of mine.

Victoria chuckles to herself. Like she told herself a joke in her mind.

VICTORIA
 Tell that to your family. They all
 look at me like they know something
 about you that I don't.
 (MORE)

VICTORIA (CONT'D)

It's this open secret I have refused to accept. Like I'm in the dark about who you really are.

MILES

I literally came out to the world last week...

Her smile fades slowly.

VICTORIA

I'd get angry at them for having the audacity to think they could keep a secret about you from me. Me? I know you. We love in ways that haven't been invented yet.

Miles clears his throat.

MILES

You're still angry.

VICTORIA

I'm angry at them. Them. Because they've decided not to see you and... God, if they could see you.

Victoria resumes nestling and folds herself into Miles.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)

I get to be with the version of you that exists away from all of this.

MILES

'All of this' is my family.

VICTORIA

It's not the only one you've got. That's why I forgave you.

Silence envelops them.

MILES

You know I'd be okay if you didn't love me, right?

VICTORIA

Who is forcing you to lie?

INT. MASENO HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dani wakes up in her bed, disoriented by the music and noise from outside. She struggles off the bed and into her sandals.

Lo is asleep on the couch at the end of the bedroom. Dani pushes out of her door.

INT. MASENO HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Four burly but clearly drunk men shuffle the coffin containing Major into the house. They place it onto the large table in the middle of the living room. One of them opens it as Dani walks into the living room. She stares at the coffin in horror and promptly starts to scream out.

DANI

ALFRED!

Dani runs to the casket, her cries piercing the night. She tries to shake Major awake. Cathy runs out from the kitchen to hold her mother. Miles and Victoria emerge from the bedroom. Anyang' emerges and stares at the spectacle - he tries to hide how horrified he truly is.

INT. MASENO HOUSE - MILES' BEDROOM - DAY

Miles stares out of the window at his grandfather's compound as it simultaneously comes alive and dies down. The drunks from the night before begin staggering out. He spots Lo coming in, covered up and looking frazzled but he doesn't think too much of it.

He turns to look at Vitoria, asleep on the bed.

EXT. MASENO HOUSE - ANIMAL SHED - DAY

Miles sits on a bucket underneath the adder of large cow. He dips his hands in tallow and proceeds to milk the cow in a series of hard strokes. Absalom comes into the shed buried in freshly cut nappier grass resting on his back.

ABSALOM

Who taught you how to do that?

MILES

Youtube.

Absalom drops the grass and cracks a smile.

MILES (CONT'D)

Dani. She taught me everything I know about animals.

ABSALOM

She hasn't been out here for a while.

Miles continues. He looks over at Absalom as he lines up the grass into a cutter.

MILES

How did you sleep?

ABSALOM

I didn't. It's hard for me to go to bed when I'm... wired.

MILES

So this is my fault?

Absalom spins them into pieces.

ABSALOM

Yes. You can make it up to me by helping me with this when you're done.

Miles smiles over at him.

INT. MASENO HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Cathy is asleep in the living room - holding her father's hand. The body has been moved indoors. That Cathy is handling it throws many of the family members off.

WOMAN 1

Haogopi?

Victoria emerges from the corridor. She looks at Cathy for a moment.

MAN 4

Siwezi! Woi. Catch me dead.

She glares at the two strangers and moves towards Cathy.

VICTORIA

Cathy...

Victoria helps Cathy up. She lets go of her father's hand and they head towards the corridor.

EXT. MASENO HOUSE - OUTSIDE SHED - DAY

Absalom is seated on a tin bucket, fiddling with the udder to release a blockage. The udder springs open again.

MILES

Is there anything you can't do?

ABSALOM

I'd tell you but you'd swoop in to try and fix it.

MILES

I wont apologize for being empathetic.

Absalom is quiet. Miles picks up the bucket and pours the milk into a container.

ABSALOM

Why are you still here?

MILES

You can clearly see me working--

ABSALOM

The funeral starts in a few hours. Don't you have fires to put out?

MILES

I've got people.

Miles stares at him for a while. He awkwardly smiles. He looks to his sides, as if in disbelief. Absalom trains his eyes on him and keeps them there.

MILES (CONT'D)

Do you demand this from everyone in your life?

Absalom stands still and Miles approaches him. Absalom holds his ground.

ABSALOM

What?

MILES

Complete transparency? Radical honesty? Don't people have a right to their secrets?

ABSALOM

Secrets fester.

MILES

That doesn't answer my question.

They're staring at each other.

ABSALOM

Yes.

MILES

But?

Miles places his hand on the wooden bar. He flips to Absalom's side. They're now side by side.

ABSALOM

To what end? Why do we keep them?

MILES

Because people are assholes.

ABSALOM

You're worried about other people again.

MILES

I don't understand why you aren't.

ABSALOM

What other people think is--

MILES

None of your business, yes. Is idealism contagious? I don't want to catch something?

Miles turns to face him. Absalom doesn't budge.

ABSALOM

Will your cynicism rub off on me?

MILES

You would be so lucky.

ABSALOM

You've got to go.

Absalom finally turns to face Miles. They stare at each other, inches from each other. The moment holds for far too many beats.

MILES

I've got to go.

ABSALOM (CONT'D)

You've got to go.

MILES (CONT'D)

What if I want to stay?

ABSALOM
That's none of my--

Miles leans to kiss him. Absalom backs away to avoid it.

ABSALOM (CONT'D)
That's not what you want.

MILES
How could you possibly know what I
want--

ABSALOM
And it's certainly not what either
of us needs.

Absalom takes Miles' hands into his. He pushes Miles close to him. He releases Miles' hands to hold his head. Absalom closes his eyes. Miles stares at him. Absalom gently tilts Miles' head and kisses him on the forehead.

ABSALOM (CONT'D)
Feel everything today.

He walks away.

INT. MASENO HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Victoria opens the Master bedroom, ready to pounce on anyone in there. She finds Miles on the bed, holding his grandfather's tie.

VICTORIA
Good color. It would suit you.

Miles nods. Victoria searches his face for a second.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)
Today is going to be brutal in so
many fucked up ways.

Miles snuffles, takes a big inhale and comes up from the emotional pit he was standing in moments before.

MILES
I'm fine. I'm...going to be fine.

Miles rubs Victoria's shoulder gently, in the way a dog would be pat by its owner. Victoria immediately notices.

VICTORIA
Did you just try to switch on? With
me?

MILES

Babe--

VICTORIA

Babe? Hmm.

She pushes back, eyebrows raised.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)

Kenya is shit. So, all of you, take
it easy on yourselves.

Victoria looks at him. He is puzzled. It occurs to her that he doesn't know yet.

INT. MASENO HOUSE - LIVING AREA - DAY

Miles powers through the house, looking for his friends. All the screens have the decision replaying over and over.

The high court has refused to repeal the colonial era clause that criminalizes homosexuality.

There are murmurs from all quarters. Homophobic statements thrown around him. He finds Dwayne staring at the screen in the living room. They stand next to each other in silence. Watching. Dwayne's body is shaking. His feet tap the ground in a nervous monotony.

DWAYNE

Fuck them.

Miles gently stretches his hand across the width of Dwayne's back and gently rubs it. As he retreats his hand, Dwayne grabs it and crumples into his arms.

INT. MASENO HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Lo is preparing for the day's cooking with some of the other women.

LO

Maria, please get the beans from
the shed?

Maria nods but doesn't look her in the face. None of the women look at her directly. She looks more than a little disheveled. She is also carrying a black eye with a nasty gash under it. It's fresh.

MILES

Ber ahinya?

The ladies remain quiet. Miles spots Lo and rushes over to her.

MILES (CONT'D)

What happened? Get the first aid kit.

Maria hesitates, but Miles sends her a look that has her running off into the house in search of the kit.

LO

Not right now Miles.

MILES

That is a gash under your eye. It *will* get infected.

Lo holds her ground.

MILES (CONT'D)

Please?

Lo looks at Miles. Her eye twitches as she fights the waterworks. She looks away suddenly before taking a seat. Still, she keeps her composure collected.

MILES (CONT'D)

Lo--

Maria runs back in, kit in hand. She gives it to Miles.

LO

I can't...I can't look at you right now. Is that okay?

MILES

Of, course.

Miles grabs cotton wool and douses it in surgical spirit. He holds it close to her face but doesn't touch her.

MILES (CONT'D)

May I?

Lo nods 'yes'. Miles gently daps it on the wound. Lo winces.

MILES (CONT'D)

Who did this?

Lo doesn't answer. Miles continues to gently tend to the wound. He touches her face to lift her eyes to meet his. Lo immediately starts to cry.

LO
That stupid ruling. That--

Polo walks in to the kitchen, absentmindedly. He opens the fridge and looks around before spotting Lo and Miles. He drops everything.

POLO
What happened?

LO
Miles please make sure these get to
the rooms for me.

Lo, ignoring Polo, points at a basket full of neatly folded fresh towels. Miles nods.

POLO
Lo--

Lo springs up and rushes out, unwilling to talk to Polo.

MILES
Your friends did that. She won't
tell me, but I know they did.

Miles grabs the towels and leaves Polo standing in the kitchen. The women stare at him - most with scowls on their faces.

INT. MASENO HOUSE - MILES' BEDROOM - DAY

Miles is at his desk searching for something on his computer. The towels and their basket are lying on his bed. Beside him, his printer comes alive and shells out what looks like letters. He takes the papers as they come out and folds them into envelopes. On each he writes someone's name:

WRITTEN: MOM. VICTORIA. DANI.

He continues writing. Folding. Writing. Sealing.

INT. MASENO HOUSE - NATHANIEL'S ROOM - DAY

Nathaniel, in just a pair of shorts, looking like a generic model on the back of any mid-range underwear packaging, opens his door to find Miles holding a half empty towel basket. He seems surprised to see him and nervously steps out into the hallway, closing the room door behind.

MILES

I know. I make an excellent Towel boy.

Miles hands him some towels.

NATHANIEL

That doesn't mean what you think it means, but thank you.

MILES

Nate, look. Today has already gone to shit and it's barely began...

He goes quiet and takes a few inhales.

NATHANIEL

I'm a little lost--

MILES

Thank you for coming.

Nathaniel is visibly surprised. Miles takes a couple of quick inhales, readying himself to say more. It looks painful.

MILES (CONT'D)

I know Major liked what he thought you were. And I'm sorry. Kind of.

Nathaniel stands right up against Miles. It should be sexually charged but it reads as just being really just uncomfortable.

NATHANIEL

A conditional apology is more than I deserve. I'll take it.

Nathaniel strikes him with his secret weapon: a smile that could melt the sun.

MILES

Right.

NATHANIEL

I'm going to go back in, if that's okay? Not that this wasn't...amazing.

Miles chuckles and backs away. A phone rings in Nathaniel's room. Miles hears another voice in there. Nathaniel's smile cracks. They stare at each other long enough to watch the joy drain from the moment.

Miles pushes past Nathaniel and goes into the bedroom.

NATHANIEL (CONT'D)

Wait. Miles, You can't just barge
into--

Sitting on the edge of the bed, holding an I-pad with images of naked men with tattoos on them, in just a pair of underpants, is Alex. He looks up at Miles and offers an unconvincing smile.

ALEX

Morning fam. Uhm...

MILES

16. Fucking...

Alex is thrown off by Miles' aggression. Miles holds for a second and scans the room, spotting Alex's clothes. He grabs and throws them at Alex. Nathaniel is rooted to the door - blocking it. Trying to act casual.

MILES (CONT'D)

16--

ALEX

Is everything okay--

MILES

Put your clothes on.

Alex looks over at Nathaniel, who looks away. He hesitates in the confusion. Miles grabs the chair by the window desk and smashes it on the floor. It crashes with a loud bang, startling both Alex and Nathaniel.

MILES (CONT'D)

Now.

NATHANIEL

Fuck, Miles--

Miles' knees buckle a little and he almost loses balance in pure rage. Miles reaches and grabs Alex's arm, pushing him towards the door.

MILES

Get up.

Alex is visibly terrified.

ALEX

What are you doing--

NATHANIEL

Miles, what the fuck--

Miles spins around, letting go of Alex. He grabs a half empty bottle of wine off the table and smashes it against the wall's edge. The bottle shatters, spilling red across the room. He holds up the broken edge like a weapon.

MILES

Move.

Nathaniel backs away, out into the corridor. Maria, carrying a load of laundry, catches the violent spectacle from the corridor. She drops the pile and runs back into the house - screaming.

MARIA

Woi! Atamuua! (He'll kill him).

A crowd begins to gather outside Nathaniel's room

UNCLE 1

Kijana, put that down please.

NATHANIEL

Uncle, it's fine--

UNCLE 2

It's not fine. Beatrice, call the police--

Miles grabs Alex and powers out of the room.

INT. MASENO HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Maria runs into the kitchen, frantically screaming.

MARIA

Woi anamuua!

LO

What are you talking about? Who?

MARIA

Anamuuuu. Anamuua.

LO

Words, Maria. Use words.

MARIA

Miles atamuua.

Just as Lo is about to spring into action, Miles walks through the door, dragging Alex by the collar of his shirt in one hand and brandishing the broken bottle in the other. The women gasp and retreat in shock.

He makes eye contact with Lo but says nothing. She doesn't say anything either. Miles pushes Alex out in front of him and through the door. His Uncle tries to stop him.

UNCLE 2

Kijana, you cannot just--

MILES

Are you done stealing our cutlery?

His uncle looks around, embarrassed. He tries to laugh it off.

UNCLE 2

What are--

MILES

This is my grandfather's house. You are a guest here. Act like it.

Miles tosses the broken bottle in the trash before joining Alex outside.

Lo looks daggers at Maria.

LO

Tokeni! Get out of my kitchen.

The crowd disperses.

EXT. MASENO HOUSE - ANIMAL SHED - DAY

Miles releases Alex with a violent push. He starts to pace. Alex tries to adjust his shirt.

MILES

Did he hurt you?

ALEX

I'm so confused--

MILES

Did he...did he touch you or--

ALEX

I don't understand--

Alex looks down. Up. To the side. Around. Anywhere but directly at Miles.

ALEX (CONT'D)

He was just showing me...

Miles stops pacing and stares at Alex.

MILES
No, no. Finish.

Alex is quiet.

MILES (CONT'D)
He shows you the tattoo in his
inner thigh - the one he 'regrets' -
the one that made him 'hate'
tattoos. Then he asks to see your
thigh so he can tell you whether
it's a good spot to get one. Any of
this sound familiar?

Alex trails off as he begins to link the dots together. He is still deeply confused.

ALEX
Can I go?

MILES
Answer the question.

ALEX
He was...He was--

MILES
What? He was What?

Alex hardens up. Miles takes a seat in the corner. His head buried in his hands.

MILES (CONT'D)
Okay. Okay. Go.

Alex holds for a moment. He turns to walk away.

MILES (CONT'D)
Actually, sit down.

He turns back and reluctantly sits down. Miles stands up and paces again.

ALEX
Okay?

He stops and stands dead still - looking at the ground. Without moving he starts to speak.

MILES

When I was in high school - maybe a little younger than you are right now...

He looks up at the spot he and Absalom were standing.

MILES (CONT'D)

Nathaniel...

Miles takes a labored inhale. His voice cracks.

MILES (CONT'D)

He-- He hurt me.

ALEX

Miles, I don't--

MILES

I need you to just-- It won't come out if you-- just listen, okay?

Alex sits back down.

MILES (CONT'D)

He was a handsome charismatic man who knew how to work a powerpoint presentation.

Miles takes a moment to breath. His eyes glass over in rage.

MILES (CONT'D)

He'd tell me things and I'd believe them. He'd tell me to...He had this amazing way of making me feel like I was in charge of it all. Like nothing he ever asked of me wasn't already something I was happy to do.

ALEX

I thought he was your Uncle or something?

Miles lets out a guttural chuckle and falls into his haunches.

MILES

I introduced him to my parents as my 'mentor'. Soon after, they were calling him family. We were together for years.

ALEX

I'm confused, you two dated?

He taps the ground with his fingers.

MILES

Yes. I mean, no. No. The point here is, I was a kid. Unless I was with him.

His eyes glass over. He looks off to the side, lost in his own world.

MILES (CONT'D)

When I was with him, I was something else. Somewhere between being alive and curved hollow.

He stands up.

MILES (CONT'D)

I got older and he found someone younger. I bet a few of them.

ALEX

I didn't even know he was gay.

MILES

I didn't know you were?

ALEX

I'm not.

MILES

Nathaniel isn't gay. He's a pedophile. There's a difference.

Miles coughs our dry air. He clears his throat, waiting for Alex's response. We watches as the denial washes over the boy's face.

ALEX

I swear it was completely innocent up there...

MILES (CONT'D)

It wasn't. Trust me. That's how grooming works. You can't understand it--

Miles inhales sharply. He taps his forehead and bites his lips.

MILES (CONT'D)

Look, I know you're a kid and I'm throwing things at you. I don't mean to sound preachy or condescending.

(MORE)

MILES (CONT'D)

Fuck knows age doesn't
automatically foster understanding,
but even now--

He rubs opposing shoulders, bundling himself into a self-hug.

MILES (CONT'D)

He got me to do -- things.

Alex looks away. Miles shakes his body, trying to throw his insecurity out with every shake.

MILES (CONT'D)

Things that I had to keep secret.
Because I had an 'old soul'. And I
thought - fuck it, I'm dating a
real man.

Alex fixes his shirt again.

MILES (CONT'D)

But I wasn't an 'old soul', I was
just traumatized. It's like his
superpower is being able to sniff
out vulnerability. A pervier 'It'.

Miles chuckles at his own joke. Then - Silence. Miles' is face begging to be believed. Alex sighs. Miles understands. He looks down again.

ALEX

Miles - I feel for you. But--

MILES

I'm trying to explain--

ALEX

I would never let some random guy
touch me.

Miles looks up. He pushes away the hurt on his face with a strained smile.

ALEX (CONT'D)

I just want to go.

Miles steps aside. Alex awkwardly slides past him. He stops to say something but Miles waves him off. He stands there, alone, surrounded by cows. He keels over and vomits.

INT. MASENO HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Miles walks to the fridge. He catches some of the women staring at him. Victoria bursts in.

VICTORIA
Murder? That's what we're doing
this morning? Full-on murder?

MILES
You're defending him now?

Miles opens the fridge.

VICTORIA
Don't--don't do that. Don't flip
this on me. I'm not the one dumb
enough to end up in prison doing 25
to life for a fucking kid diddler--

Miles emerges from the fridge deeply disturbed.

MILES
Fuck me. That's just fucking
insensitive--

He grabs the bottle of jam and closes the door. He walks over to a surface that has all the trimmings for a sandwich.

VICTORIA
What was that all about?

Miles stops assembling his sandwich.

MILES
So you can go around punching
people like a ferrel cat on heat--

VICTORIA
I'm going to ignore that--

MILES
But the second I show an iota of
emotion--

VICTORIA
Wait, what are we talking about?
Who said you weren't allowed to
fucking emote?

Miles bangs his hands on the table. It reverberates across the kitchen.

MILES

Then what the fuck do you want?

Victoria gently backs away and starts looking through drawers and cabinets.

MILES (CONT'D)

Stop. Stop that...

Miles exhales audibly and drops his knife on the counter.

LO

What are you looking for?

MILES

She's helping me -- she's helping me find who the fuck I think I am to talk to her like that.

Victoria opens, looks inside, and closes the fridge.

VICTORIA

Because I know- I just know - it's not me. I can appreciate that you're going through a lot--

MILES

How the fuck would you know? My grandfather is lying in a coffin outside--

Victoria stops searching and engages Miles in a stand-off.

VICTORIA

I'm a fucking orphan you stupid shit. This is not about Major so you can put that particular card back where you got it.

MILES

So only *you* have the capacity to mourn? *You* have exclusivity on the act of grieving?

VICTORIA

Were sticking with that shitty narrative? Cool, cool, cool, cool.

MILES

Get off my dick--

VICTORIA

Stop being a cunt.

Lo hits her ladle against a metal pot lid.

LO

Enough.

MILES

I was leaving--

Miles walks out of the kitchen. Sandwich in hand.

VICTORIA

I'm still talking to you--

MILES

I'm still leaving.

Maria catches Victoria's eye line. She opens her mouth to say something but:

VICTORIA

Maria, if you breathe a word in my direction, so help me Blue Ivy--

Maria backs down. Victoria leaves the kitchen.

INT. MASENO HOUSE - MILES'S BEDROOM - DAY

Victoria barges into the room - furious. She kicks the chair by Miles' desk. Miles' letters come flying out of his tote bag. She absentmindedly picks them up and places them on the table before going into the bathroom. The letter atop the pile is addressed to her.

EXT. MASENO HOUSE - FRONT YARD - DAY (VARIOUS)

The funeral activities are underway in the hot sun - and even though everyone is under tents, the heat feels particularly vicious.

MOONIE

Why do people at funerals have such bad taste?

EDDY

My senses are truly being assaulted.

GEORGIE

I don't understand how we're the miscreants. That corduroy suit is the real crime here.

The family are sat on the front row of their designated tent.

- A) Mourners are fanning themselves.
- B) Speeches are being made.
- C) Food is being served.
- D) Respects are being paid to Major. His coffin has been placed at the center of the property.
- E) The Catholic service has the mourners stand and sit numerous times.
- F) Politicians roll up in big cars that swirl the dust up. Each baying for a chance at the microphone to push their agenda. Some make homophobic comments about the ruling.
- G) Dwayne and a few of Mile's gay friends stand up and briefly exit (they'll be back).
- H) Miles offers Victoria, who's seated behind him, some water when she starts to cough. She ignores him.
- I) The family are forced to take photos by the coffin.
- J) Miles scolds a videographer who keeps putting the camera in his grandmother's face and he seems to be the only one not enjoying the humor of the loud village drunk as he shouts out affirmations during the speeches.
- I) Victoria excuses herself to freshen up.

INT. MASENO HOUSE - MILES' BEDROOM

Victoria emerges from the bathroom and looks for hand lotion on the desk. She finally notices that the envelope on top of the pile of letters is addressed to her. She opens and reads it.

EXT. MASENO HOUSE - FRONT YARD - DAY

The family are sweating into their elaborate clothes. Miles takes a sip of his water. It is hot to the touch. Speeches are still going on. The MC (40) turns to look at the family.

MC

I'd like to invite our widow to say
a few words.

Dani exhales in exhaustion.

DANI

He makes it sound like I've won a prize.

She palms her book, opens the page bookmarked and hands it to her daughter. Cathy takes it, a little confused at first. She moved to the middle of the field and takes the microphone.

CATHY

Thank you. Thank you all for coming. My mother has asked me to read...

Cathy chokes. She inhales deeply.

CATHY (CONT'D)

My mother has...

Miles moves to stand behind his mother: his hand gently resting on her shoulder. She turns to look at him. He nods and looks down.

CATHY (CONT'D)

Asked me to read Daddy's favorite poem. He read this to all of us. I'm sure most of us know it by heart. Especially Miles here...

She looks out into the crowd. It's silent save for the town drunk.

CATHY (CONT'D)

It is actually Miles' Birthday today.

Miles looks up, a little confused. The claps come splattering from the crowd.

CATHY (CONT'D)

We had a hard choice to make about the dates. Miles made the choice for us. Because that's the kind of man-- That's the kind of man, Major raised him to be.

Philemon fumes in his chair at the back of the tent. Cathy turns to look at Miles. Their eyes meet again. She smiles for a moment, inhales deeply and adjusts her sunglasses.

CATHY (CONT'D)

His friends have come from Nairobi to support him. Miles, do you mind just introducing them?

The gays all simultaneously look down. Miles is confused. Unsure of what to do.

CATHY (CONT'D)
Please? Just...

Miles and Cathy shift positions. He is now at the microphone. He looks out at the massive crowd.

MILES
We're doing this. Okay. We have Moonie--

Cathy jumps back on the mic from the side.

CATHY
Stand up, please. Thank you.

Awkward glances are exchanged. Miles looks out at his friends. They affirm him.

MILES
We have Moonie and...

He looks around at the crowd again. They all seem uninterested. Miles looks at his friends again and takes off his glasses.

MILES (CONT'D)
Moonie is one of Africa's top fashion consultants and creative directors. He just came back from the Venice Biennial where his work was featured in the main Pavilion. Moonie please...

Moonie attempts to remain seated but Polo starts a round of applause from his tent - surprising everyone. Especially Miles. They join in. Moonie is compelled to stand up.

MILES (CONT'D)
Thank you. Please keep standing.

MOONIE
Sis!

Moonie throws his hands up in the air in mock-frustration. Some people chuckle.

MILES
George--or Georgie, is the head of Leva. A fund created to support the art industry with a endowment of nearly 60 million USD.
(MORE)

MILES (CONT'D)

To date, they have helped establish
and sustain over 100 creative

MOONIE

(shouting)

150.

The crowd laughs in amazement.

MILES

Well damn. My bad. 150 creative
enterprises across East Africa.

Georgie stands up, putting his bags on the ground first. Polo
continues to lead the claps. The elders are confused but they
go along with it.

MILES (CONT'D)

Eddy and his...

Miles looks at Eddy who nods - giving him the 'go-ahead'.

MILES (CONT'D)

Eddy, his partner and Oliver run
an interior design firm with
exclusive rights to at least 6 golf
estates across the country.

Eddy chuckles as he and Oliver stand up. Eddy raising his
hands to clap above Oliver's head.

MILES (CONT'D)

Dwayne runs *Jumuia*, Kenya's largest
e-commerce brand and Mano. Well you
heard him earlier today. He is a
member of *Laini* - Africa's most
popular boyband. He just got back
from Lithuania where the band won
East Africa's very first MTV EMA
award.

The crowd rouses up at the mention of *Laini*. Dwayne and Mano
stand up.

MILES (CONT'D)

These are my people. My chosen
family. They have survived more
than any of you will ever know. I
need you to look at them. Before
you sit down girls, listen to me
when I say this -- because I mean
every word of it. This country
doesn't deserve any of you or any
of the magic that you are.

The claps die down awkwardly, but the moment isn't lost on Miles and his friends. Cathy takes to the microphone again.

CATHY

This was my father's favorite piece.

Cathy proceeds to read the poem. Miles's hand never leaving her shoulder.

EXT. MASENO HOUSE - BURIAL SITE - DAY

There is chaos by the grave. People pushing to get a glimpse of the coffin as it is placed on the lowering rig. The Deacon begins his prayers of commitment.

PRIEST

May the love of God and the peace of the Lord Jesus Christ bless and console us and gently wipe every tear from our eyes: in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

The crying, screaming and yelling intensify. Dani can barely stand so they bring her a seat.

PRIEST (V.O.)

Merciful Lord, turn toward us and listen to our prayers: open the gates of paradise to your servant and help us who remain to comfort one another with assurances of faith, until we all meet in Christ and are with you and with our brother for ever. Through Christ our Lord.

The casket is lowered. The screaming intensifies. Polo tries to jump into the grave but is restrained. Cathy is inconsolable. Dani remains stoic, but present. Miles catches a glimpse of it going down but is too busy co-ordinating the logistics of the flowers.

PRIEST (V.O.)

To you, O Lord, we commend the soul of Albert Abednego 'Major' Ojwang' your servant; in the sight of this world he is now dead; in your sight may he live for ever.

(MORE)

PRIEST (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Forgive whatever sins he committed
 through human weakness and in your
 goodness grant him everlasting
 peace. Through Christ our Lord.

Miles is pushed around in the mayhem but he regains control .
 He signals Alex to bring the flowers. Victoria helps him.
 They bring out the wreaths and individual flowers.

PRIEST (V.O.)
 Merciful Lord, you know the anguish
 of the sorrowful, you are attentive
 to the prayers of the humble. Hear
 your people who cry out to you in
 their need, and strengthen their
 hope in your lasting goodness.
 Through Christ our Lord.

Dani and Polo drop their wreaths into the grave. Cathy
 struggles to hold it together when her turn comes.

MILES
 Mom, mom, please--

CATHY
 Woi daddy--

MILES VICTORIA
 Mom-- Cathy please--

Cathy hangs low. Almost as though she's about to pass out.
 Miles and victoria plead with her.

MILES (CONT'D)
 It's just this part. It's almost
 over. Mom, please.

Cathy is helped to the edge of the grave where she places the
 wreath and breaks into a guttural cry. Miles exhales. His
 body relaxes. Then a bunch of roses are shoved in front of
 his face. Miles looks around, confused. In the chaos of it
 all, he had forgotten that he too needed to place a flower in
 the grave. He stares at the weeping masses. Motionless. Time
 stops. His chest hurts more and more with each breath. He
 tries to speak, but his mouth dries up. He doesn't notice how
 wet his cheeks are. He begins hyperventilating and tries to
 push his way out of the crowd. Victoria holds him.

MILES (CONT'D)
 I can't...

He stutters, barely making out the words.

MILES (CONT'D)

I can't. I can't. I can't...

He repeats it over and over again - falling into Victoria's chest with a sound that's caught between a scream and a growl.

In this moment, it hits him - his grandfather is gone.

EXT. MASENO HOUSE - FRONT YARD - EVENING

Miles and Victoria are the only ones left standing by the gravesite. They watch as Absalom pats the last of the cement atop the site of commitment.

VICTORIA

He's not there.

With each 'thud' from the instrument, Miles' body shudders.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)

He's not there.

Victoria doesn't let go of him. Miles cries quietly.

INT. MASENO HOUSE - MAJOR'S STUDY - NIGHT

Miles is seated at Major's desk. Major's journals are open. He's staring at them. Reading and re-reading pages. He gets agitated and visibly frustrated.

Victoria walks into the study with her hands behind her. Miles doesn't look up.

MILES

I called him the day before - just to give him a heads up about the article. I hadn't spoken to him in months. Mum told me he was asking for me. I just knew.

Victoria inches closer.

MILES (CONT'D)

It was a very standard call. Until he asked me how I was a second time. And I broke down. Before I realized what I was saying, I was talking about boys.

Miles laughs out loud, tapping the table with his knuckles.

MILES (CONT'D)
I didn't know coming out by
accident was a thing.

He looks up at Victoria - finally.

MILES (CONT'D)
He said nothing. Absolutely
nothing. I mean. Victoria, the man
was dead silent.

Miles chuckles and wipes his tears.

MILES (CONT'D)
I just heard that. Anyway when I
got these today I thought, he's got
to have written something about it.
About me. But--

Miles lifts the book up and fans the empty pages.

MILES (CONT'D)
I don't know which feels worse--

VICTORIA (O.S.)
Hey Miles, Is this a suicide note?
It was addressed to me. So I opened
it. Are all of these--

Miles looks up to see Vitoria waving the letters in the air.
Miles' face goes cold.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)
I wondered how long it would take
me to forgive you. To stop hating
you. Is that why you were asking me
about forgiveness yesterday?

MILES
Victoria, listen to me--

VICTORIA
I'd forgive you. Of course I'd
forgive you. Eventually. I love
you... loved you? But, before I
walked in here--

Miles stands up and rushes to Victoria. He takes a breath and
looks at her.

MILES
Listen to me--

VICTORIA

Before I walked in here I hadn't decided whether - if, I would ever stop hating you.

Miles tries to touch her. She moves her shoulder away. Victoria opens her letter and shows him.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)

Is this what you would say to me?

Miles backs away and slides down the front of the desk. He closes his eyes.

MILES

I have been getting death threats every day since that fucking article was published--

VICTORIA

So, take yourself out of the entire equation altogether? Beat them to the punch? That's your plan? You'd rather exit than be a part of--

MILES

A part of what? They don't want us here!

VICTORIA

Who?

Miles opens his eyes and throws her look of contempt.

MILES

Oh, so we're asking stupid questions now?

VICTORIA

Who, Miles?

MILES

Are you being intentionally obtuse? Victoria, I am tired.

VICTORIA

I know you're tired. I know. And if that's why you want to go--

Victoria rests on the arm of the couch.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)

I will be furious but I won't begrudge you that. But Miles...

(MORE)

VICTORIA (CONT'D)

Miles, If 'they' are the reason you wrote this? Then fuck you.

MILES

Okay--

She stands up and walks over to him.

VICTORIA

Fuck you for allowing yourself to believe that this is not as much a piece of your world as it is theirs.

MILES

That's really not fair. That is not fair, Victoria.

She pops a squat in-front of him and drops the letters in his lap.

VICTORIA

Show me what is?

Miles tries to speak, but nothing comes out.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)

We don't get fair. Nobody gets fair. We get what we fight for when it's not handed to us but fuck it you have to fight--

He looks up at her. Defeated.

MILES

I am...tired--

She places her hand on his chest

VICTORIA

Show me a single person who isn't.

MILES

They--

Victoria sits down. Softening herself. Miles' head is heavy. It hangs against the desk.

VICTORIA

You're going to have to tell me who 'they' are because I'm getting sick of 'them' always popping up at the center of all your excuses.

She lifts his head with her hand. He looks her in the eyes and sees the hurt in them.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)
I was cracking jokes about your funeral all day yesterday.

CATHY
Am I interrupting?

Cathy enters the study carrying a small box. Miles pushes himself up and hides the letters.

MILES
No no.

VICTORIA
I'll leave you two--

CATHY
No. Stay.

Victoria goes to a wall of books and pretends to be interested in them.

Cathy hands Miles a box. He cracks a warm smile.

CATHY (CONT'D)
Happy birthday.

Miles opens it eagerly.

CATHY (CONT'D)
I know your grandfather already has...had a copy, but now you have your own.

The gift is a beautifully embossed book.

MILES
Thank you. You didn't have to--

CATHY
I am your mother. I know things haven't always been--

Miles puts the book on the table.

CATHY (CONT'D)
But, I am still your mother.

She hugs him, pats Victoria on the arm and leaves. Vitoria and Miles look at each other.

MILES
Was that an apology?

VICTORIA
I think it was.

MILES (CONT'D)
That's got to be some kind of black
child achievement.

VICTORIA
You really just won here.

MILES
Wow. The bar, though...

VICTORIA
Mama, the bar is in hell.

Victoria takes a closer look at the book. Miles slides back to
the ground.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)
How are books still a gift?

MILES
If you read more you'd understand.

VICTORIA
I buy books all the time, okay?

MILES
Buying books and actually reading
them are two entirely separate
hobbies.

VICTORIA
Separate, but valid.

They stare at each other. Tears gently roll down Miles'
cheeks. He doesn't bother to wipe them.

MILES
He's really gone, huh?

VICTORIA
You're changing the subject.

Victoria squats down next to him.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)
When my parents died, it wasn't
long before everyone started
getting tired of my grief.

Miles sniffles and looks at her.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)
 So I did what I always do and I
 managed the fuck out of it. I swore
 to move on.

MILES
 You did.

VICTORIA
 I did?

VICTORIA (CONT'D)
 I text my mother. Everyday.

Victoria rolls back on the ground, grabs her fanny pack and
 takes out her second phone. She hands it over to Miles.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)
 They give your number away if a
 month goes by with no activity.
 Turns out, as long as you load it
 up with airtime once in a while,
 Safaricom doesn't really insist on
 proof of life to keep a line
 active.

Miles goes through the message app on the second phone.

ON PHONE:

3509 UNREAD MESSEGES FROM VICTORIA *heart emoji* DAUGHTER

VICTORIA (CONT'D)
 I suppose the airtime thing is
 their way of ...'proving' life.
 Hmm. I hadn't really thought about
 that.

Victoria takes out her phone and shows Miles all the texts
 she sends to her mother's phone.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)
 So, no. I didn't 'move on'. I don't
 think anyone does. You live with
 it.

MILES
 Without them.

Miles hands the phone back.

VICTORIA
 Already getting the hang of it.

MILES

I wasn't going to kill myself. But I haven't felt safe recently. Look what happened to Lo.

Victoria takes his hand into hers.

MILES (CONT'D)

At least this way, If something happens to me, you will all know how I felt about you.

Victoria raises her head to try and hold the tears back. She drops it a moment later in defeat.

VICTORIA

I was so scared.

She looks at him for a while. He cries openly, smiling through the tears, never breaking eye contact.

MILES

I'm sorry. I'm sorry I do stupid shit.

VICTORIA

Like threaten to stab people's sons with broken bottles?

Silence.

MILES

He deserved it.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)

The absolute fucker.

He never breaks eye contact with Victoria.

MILES (CONT'D)

Also, I can't die now? My grandfather left me so much money--

VICTORIA

Miles, Jesus--

MILES

Too soon?

They chuckle and dry their eyes.

VICTORIA

Can we go eat?

MILES

Yes please. Let me just clear this. Also, put those back where you found them you messy ho.

VICTORIA
Rude. But accurate.

Victoria puts the books back, occasionally flipping through a few. Miles tidies up the desk. He closes the journals and breathes in deeply - letting it go.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)
My mother would kill me if I wrote
in the margins of the books I buy
but don't read.

Miles cocks his head up. He looks at the book on the table and at Victoria. His face lights up. He shoves his gift into Victoria's hand.

MILES
Help me find this exact book.

VICTORIA
Why?

MILES
Victoria--

She resigns with her hands up.

VICTORIA
I'm looking, I'm looking.

Miles goes through book after book after book until he finds it, hidden between 'The River Between' and 'Hamlet'.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)
Found it?

Miles sits down with the book. He opens it. A news paper clipping falls out.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)
Thank fuck, cause I wasn't really
looking--are you okay?

Victoria picks up the clipping and unfolds it. It's Miles' article:

'WE BELONG HERE' - MILES OTIENO

Miles inhales sharply - catching his breath as it hangs on to every word scribbled within the margins of the book. He cries between bursts of laughter. He hands the book to Victoria, on the open page. In it, is Major's writing. It reads:

WRITING ON PAGE:

MY BOY,

AS I GRAPPLE WITH THE REALITY OF MY IMPENDING TRANSITION, I FIND MYSELF WANDERING THE VICIOUS TUNDRA OF HINDSIGHT. I WISH THAT MY CHILDREN HAD BEEN RAISED BY THE MAN YOU TAUGHT ME TO BECOME. IN THIS WAY, I FEAR I MAY HAVE FAILED THEM.

I COULD NOT GIVE THEM WHAT I HAD YET TO LEARN MYSELF. MILES, YOU ARE MY GIFT. ONE I READILY ADMIT TO HAVING NEVER DESERVED. I HAVE FALLEN ENDLESSLY SHORT IN THIS MEASURE. IT NOW APPEARS THAT I HAVE RAN OUT OF TIME IN THIS LIFE. I BEG YOU TO SPARE THIS OLD MAN, WHOSE HEART YOU RENEW WITH EVERY INHALE YOU TAKE, TWO FINAL ASKS.

THE FIRST IS THIS: WHEN IT IS POSSIBLE, PLEASE HOLD MY CHILDREN IN GRACE AND EMPATHY. I APPRECIATE THAT I HAVE NO RIGHT TO ASK THAT YOU EXTEND THIS LABOR OF UNDERSERVED KINDNESS TO THOSE YOU HAVE HAD TO SURVIVE. BUT HERE I AM. SELFISHLY ASKING. FOR ME. FOR THEM. BECAUSE THEY WILL NOT ASK THIS OF YOU THEMSELVES (BUT WILL UNDOUBTABLY EXPECT IT NEVERTHELESS).

I ALSO KNOW THIS OF YOU - THE VASTNESS OF YOUR COMPASSION WILL, BY ITS VERY NATURE, EXTEND ITSELF TO FREELY PERFORM THIS LABOR. IT IS WHO YOU ARE. YOU TAKE CARE OF THOSE YOU LOVE - EVEN WHEN IT IS MET WITH STINGING REJECTION. I ASK THAT YOU TO UNBURDEN YOURSELF FROM CARRYING THIS RESPONSIBILITY AS YOUR OWN PERSONAL COMMISSION - IF ONLY IN NAME AND PURPOSE.

IN THE MOMENTS WHEN LOVING THIS FAMILY GETS DIFFICULT AND YOU CANNOT STRIP YOURSELF FROM THIS UNDUE TAX, PUT IT ON ME. I WILL CARRY THE SHAME OF THIS ASK. THIS IS THE ONLY REDRESS I CAN THINK TO OFFER: ONE THAT I HOPE WILL HOLD LONG AFTER I HAVE MADE MY EXIT.

HOWEVER, BLOOD OF MY BLOOD, THIS FIRST ASK IS NOT WITHOUT CONDITION. HEREIN LIES MY SECOND AND FINAL REQUEST. IF THE FULL GLORY OF WHO YOU ARE IS SEEMINGLY TOO OVERWHELMING FOR ANY OF OUR KINFOLK, AND YOUR HUMANITY IS CHALLENGED IN ANY WAY - I ASK THAT YOU PRESERVE YOURSELF FIRST. PROTECT THE SOFTNESS THAT SURROUNDS YOUR GENTLE HEART - IT IS WHAT ALLOWS IT TO BEAT AS FEROSIOUSLY AS IT DOES. IT GOES WITHOUT SAYING - BUT THIS SECOND ASK, DESPITE ITS PLACEMENT IN ORDER, IS BY FAR THE GREATER ONE OF THE TWO.

WHEN MET WITH A SCENARIO WHERE BOTH OF THESE ASKS ARE IN OPPOSITION - MAY YOU ALWAYS CHOOSE THE SECOND. AND IF THAT BECOMES ARDUOUS, AGAIN, PUT IT ON ME. LET THE MEMORIES I LEAVE IN THIS LIFE AND MY JOURNEY INTO THE NEXT CARRY THIS FOR YOU.

YOU HAVE TO PROMISE TO LOVE YOURSELF. PROMISE IT. LOVE YOURSELF SELFISHLY. RESOLUTELY. BRAVELY.

EVEN IN THE MOMENTS WHEN THIS FEELS OVERWHELMING; AND I IMAGINE THAT SOMETIMES IT WILL (DESPITE NEVER HAVING EVER EXPERIENCED IT AS ANYTHING OTHER THAN EASY AND ENDLESSLY REWARDING MYSELF).

LOVE YOURSELF AT LEAST AS MUCH AS YOU LOVE THOSE WHOM YOU CHERISH AND CARE FOR.

I AM AMAZED BY THE VASTNESS OF YOUR BRAVERY. TO HAVE ORBITED YOUR SUN IN THE CAPACITY OF YOUR GRANDFATHER HAS BEEN THE GREATEST HONOR OF MY LIFE.

YOUR EXCEEDINGLY PROUD GRANDFATHER.

THE MAN WHOSE HEART YOU HOLD - UNRESERVEDLY, UNCONDITIONALLY AND ETERNALLY

P.S.

I SENT THIS ARTICLE TO MY OLD TEACHER WITH A NOTE: 'SHAKESPEAR? I RAISE YOU MY GRANSON'. I LATER FOUND OUT HE WAS DEAD. IT STILL FELT GREAT.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)

Major was mad petty. I really enjoy it.

Miles busts into laughter. So does Victoria. It's a cathartic joyous cackle that reverberates across the house.

EXT. MASENO HOUSE - FRONT YARD - NIGHT

Miles is seated with his grandmother, watching the compound simultaneously come alive in celebration and die down in numbers. They share a piece of watermelon. The tents begin coming down as the drunks take over the dance floor. Family members begin to leave.

AKINYI

Dani it was good to see you.

DANI

Asante Mjukuu.

ACHIENG'

We'll come back to visit. I promise.

Dani nods politely. The women wave at everyone else and leave.

DANI
I don't like those girls.

CATHY VICTORIA
Mum-- Nyanya--

The three of them burst out into hearty laughter.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)
Careful, *Dani*. You're making me
Stan. And I was already a fan.

Dwayne comes over to say goodbye.

DWAYNE
Heifer, we're leaving in 30. Hello
Mama Miles.

CATHY
Ni nini tulikukosea, Dwayne?

DWAYNE
Ai, mum?

CATHY
Why have you never come back to my
house?

DWAYNE
See this son of yours? *Wewe - Wapi*
invite?

Dwayne extends his hand to point at Miles.

MILES
I'd like to be excluded from this
particular narrative---

VICTORIA
What in the Taylor Swiftism--

MILES
Okay. I'll say this once. 'Red'
slapped.

Dwayne and Victoria erupt in mock-shock.

DANI
I like your eyes.

DWAYNE
I like yours too *Dani*.

They share an awkward but sickly-sweet high-five.

MILES

Wait for me, I'll be right there.

Dwayne gives everyone air kisses and walks to the parking lot.

Polo tries to move past them, walking to his boys,

DANI

Baba, *hambaa*.

Polo strides back.

DANI (CONT'D)

Where is your father? He's missing this.

The three of them stare at each other.

MILES

Let me go check on him.

POLO

I'll go.

CATHY

I'll come with.

The three, Cathy, Polo and Dani hobble into the house. Victoria joins Miles. They sit, arm in arm, and watch as the evening activities come to life.

MILES

I'm going to say something and I need you to not judge me.

VICTORIA

I'm going to say okay but we both know I'm lying.

Miles looks back at where her family walked into the house.

MILES

I envy her right now.

Victoria raises her eyebrows.

MILES (CONT'D)

She doesn't remember he's not here and I envy her. I'm almost jealous.

(MORE)

MILES (CONT'D)

I remember it a second or two after I wake up and I swear if I could live in that moment before for just a breath longer...You're Judging me.

VICTORIA

You knew what you signed up for, Elphaba.

MILES

Maybe they're right. Maybe--just maybe, he's in a better place.

A moment of silence passes. They look at each other. Puzzled.

VICTORIA

Did you hear yourself just now?

MILES (CONT'D)

The moment I said it. The moment I said it.

They sit in silence.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)

This is the part where we awkwardly discuss how you had planned to do it. Run down the different options.

MILES

This is the part I promise not to kill myself. Again.

VICTORIA

I can't make you promise that. See that? Now that's unfair.

MILES

What isn't?

Victoria smiles at the callback.

MILES (CONT'D)

This is still home.

VICTORIA

Is it?

MILES

Home is any place that makes you forget the world is on fire.

They stare at each other and burst out laughing.

VICTORIA
That sounded contrived as
Fuck--

MILES (CONT'D)
That was really bad...

VICTORIA (CONT'D)
Who even-

MILES
Nat--

Victoria falls to the ground screaming with laughter.

VICTORIA
Should have known monkey breath was
behind that labored mess. I should
punch him again. On principle--

MILES
Can you stop physically assaulting
my demons? It's rude.

EXT. MASENO HOUSE - VERANDAH - NIGHT (VARIOUS)

- A) Lo and the ladies bring out more food.
- B) They share more stories about Major.
- C) Miles gives Polo the journals:

MILES
I got what I needed.

D) Miles joins the drunks and dances for the first time,
letting loose.

EXT. MASENO HOUSE - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Miles walks to the parking lot to say goodbye to his friends.
He finds a stand-off between The Rweya sisters and the gays.

ACHIENG'
I respect you, I do, but that's not
enough to make it a national
debate...

Miles saddles up to Dwayne who is watching from the outside
of the circle.

MILES
What did I miss?

DWAYNE

Homegirls over hear have some things to say about the ruling.

AKINYI

I'm just saying, it's a bigger issue, sis.

MANO

Not 'Sis'?

OLIVER

You can't make this shit up, *aki*.

Dwayne and Miles react to the mess.

ACHIENG'

Is that offensive? Gurl, bye with that PC mess.

Eddy opens the car door and tosses his bag into it. Dwayne takes out his phone.

EDDY

See if you were just a basic bitch chugging along to the voices of the masses wrapped up in unearned fear, I'd be okay with your ignorant spiel.

The women are stupefied. Moonie steps forward.

MOONIE

May I?

EDDY

Of course.

MOONIE

But it's clear to anyone with a lick of sense that everything you are - those little quips. Your entire persona is because of us. We created that 'mess'. You are participating in and performing pop culture developed on the backs of the people you can't be bothered to genuinely empathize with.

Eddy turns to the other guys and asks

EDDY

Ladies, anything you'd like to add.

AUNTY 2

Unless that chicken is fighting
with stray dogs in the market -
don't eat it.

They all hum in agreement.

EXT. MASENO HOUSE - COMPUND

Miles and Victoria are back to watching the dancing from a
safe distance.

MILES

When did we become these people.

VICTORIA

We were always these people.

Polo and Lo are chatting up in the corner. Miles looks on. He
spots Absalom sipping beer.

MILES

I'm trying to be less like superman

VICTORIA

Which makes you even more like
Superman.

Absalom smiles and waves his beer at him.

MILES

Vicky, am I gonna go sleep with a
married man?

VICTORIA

Who, Abu?

MILES

Yes.

VICTORIA

No.

MILES

But I want to.

VICTORIA

I mean no, he's not married. It's
just a thing he tells people so
that he doesn't get too emotionally
involved. I really like him.

Absalom chuckles from a distance. He's figured that Victoria has told Miles. Miles smiles.

MILES

That fucker--

INT. MASENO HOUSE - KITCHEN AREA - DAY

A few days have passed. Miles is shaving his grandmother's head delicately. He runs a razor through the thick foam and dips it in the basin next to them.

She starts humming.

He hums along too.



terro buru

Silas Miami

MMXSIL002

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