**Title**: ‘*The Actor’*

**Writer**: JC Zondi

**Log line**: You win again

**One Paragrapher**: Our worse enemies are ourselves

**Statement of intent**: At home my mother sells booze (liquor); At times I find myself watching these people who drink daily, every day and I wonder what is going on in their minds? These men, they wake every day at 5 am in the morning to drink their lives away until 9pm and repeat the cycle, every day. Their stories vary, some emotional, some political, physical and even psychological. Based on these narratives, I thought why not create a play, a perspective of these men who swim in alcohol.

**Synopsis**

Nkosi “The king” Nkabinde is a washed-up actor, who can no longer remember who he is. He sits and watches his life through a beer bottle, he watches it, as it slowly disappears.

**Genre**

* One Hander (Drama and Comedy)

**Characters**

Nkosi “The king” Nkabinde, in his early 30s. He is a man who looks like he has lost everything and given up on life itself. He is constantly drunk. He is man who feels when he is sober, he remembers things he wants to forget. Nkosi is or was an actor.

**Chapter I**

**“Life, camera, action**”

*(The stage/theatre opens up with a man, looks to be in his early 30’s. He is sitting on a crate of beer. On his far right are couple of beer bottles, couple being an understatement. We sense there is a lot of focus. Then after a long silence, he stands up and looks at the audience*.)

**The character**: I…I live amongst you. Waiting like a predictor. I am faceless. I am meaningless and thoughtless. But I am despised and hated. But then I put on a face…wear a human face. And then I am respected, valued and appreciated. I am I…

*(There is pause. He looks dumbstruck. He squeezes his eyes. He hits his head)*

**Nkosi**: Fuck!!!!! Damnit!!! Fuck! Fuck! *(He reaches for one of the beer bottles and takes a huge gulp)*. I am I… I am what?

*(Pause. As if reflecting on self)*

I really have fallen from the top. There was a time… *(laughs)* fuck, I am an actor!

What is an actor, you ask? Well according to Michael Douglas an Actor is a God. Yes, a God, on stage, the actor is God, because what does God do, he or she if you preferred, creates. God creates life were none existed. An actor does the same thing? He/she gives life to characters, places and things. As actors we are gods! People should respect us! Not…. *(He takes another sip).* Where was I? You *(Pointing at audience member)* where was I? (*Waits for response*).

Yes, people should respect us! Should kneel before us? But no, we are treated like garbage. You should be throwing money at me right now? Panties and bras but look at you! Look at you! Sitting there waiting. What are you waiting for? I can’t even remember my god damn lines!

*(There is a long pause. He goes to sit down. He looks at the bottle in his hand).*

**Nkosi:** I don’t even like to drink *(Under his breath. Then he begins to sob).* You win again you old bastard. That’s 4 to you and zero to me!

*(Pause again)*

I’m sorry guys, I don’t seem to be myself today, I… I don’t think I can tell you my story today. I am not feeling well. Well to be honest; I am kind of drunk. If I try to tell you, I’ll keep forgetting my lines and it’s just horrible.

*(He stands to walk away. Then he stops.)*

I wasn’t like this. There was a time where I was at the top of my game! Where I’d walk on stage and people would applause, because they knew it was going to be great, nah, amazing! It was going to be amazing. Look at me now, all of you saw me and nothing? Just staring at me as if I took your money. *(Drinks)* There was a time when people were happy that I took their money.

How the mighty fall. How did I get here? How did I fall from the top, to here? Breathing the same air, the same air I use to breath when I was young and running naked? Fuck, now that I remember, I hated that air. I hated breathing the air in my town, elok’shini. It was dirty, full of dying dreams, rape culture, alcohol, HIV/AIDS, sex and poverty. I dreamt of escaping it, I wished for the day that I would wake up and escape that air. And I did! I fucking did! *(Pause)* But look at me now…

*(Silence)*

So, where did I go wrong? How am I back here, breathing that air again? Well let me tell you, okay maybe let me take a nap first then when I wake up. It will be the first thing I do.

Okay, maybe not the first, it will be the second thing I do when I wake up.

*(He falls whene he stands and takes a nap. Lights dim out.)*

Beat 2

*(When the lights come back. We see Nkosi, sitting at the same beer crate. He looks fresh, more energetic. He is doing vocal exercises. He looks a bit anxious. We can see him bouncing his foot. He stops the foot, but immediately it bounces again. It’s a game of bounce and hold down).*

**Voice over**: Nkosi Gift Nkabinde x 2 *(Nkosi gives off one last huge sigh and he stands).*

**Nkosi:** I will be doing a monologue from *‘The book of the dead’*by *Kgebetli Moele. (His whole persona has changed. He looks like a man with a vision. No fear in his eyes and no shaking. He was meant for this moment. He takes one huge sigh).*

**The character:**

I am I.

You lovingly summon me. I don’t break-in, my schemes are not like that. I am willingly invited in, and only then do I take up my position and do my work. Don’t get me wrong I love my work; It is my work and I do it with pride, but I do it in the gentlest of ways.

Many think I am only for the poor, and that I will never come for them.

**Nkosi:** The moment I finished I knew I had them by the sack *(He grabs his beer bottle from the crate).* As an actor, if you worked hard as I did, you felt when people were trapped in your performance. You feel the energy. Am I wrong? *(Asking audience*) Am I wrong? That was my first real audition. I never wanted to go to auditions until I knew I had what it took.

I don’t know what happened that day. I think, I think, someone had died, was it my neighbour? My friend? Fuck, I don’t remember, all I remember is that I took that moment as a sign. There is something about emotions and the proper use of them in acting. There is an authenticity in a performer when they draw, not all the emotions but enough to make your character real. After all characters are real too

After whatever happened that day, I told myself I can’t watch life pass me by.

*(Pause.)*

Look at me now, well, not now but somewhere in the middle of my life. I had everything I had friends, family and fans. I had… *(He looks at the beer bottle)*

I had… *(laughs).* You win again old friend.

*(He gets angry).*

Why can’t I fuckin’ beat you huh? Why? *(He screams at the bottle, and he comes back to audience as if nothing happened).*

Where was I? Can you remind me? Never mind, I remember. I got the call back. Well I never even left the building. Soon as I was stepping outside the door. I felt a tap on my shoulder, there was the young girl, breathless.

**Young girl**: Excuse me. I am told to tell you, please wait in the lobby. Come with me.

**Nkosi:** So, I sat there in the lobby, it seemed like hours passed *(Nkosi sitting, anxious with his foot dancing)*. The moment I heard my name being called again by the young lady, my life was never the same again.

**Chapter II**

**“Becoming the character”**

**Nkosi**: *(With bottles around him, offering only space in between to move around)*

They make you who they want you to be, these people in the industry. You abide to it at first; Because nobody knows you, so you must live by these invisible rules and regulations. How you speak, how you dress, who you fuck, what you say and what you don’t say, as an actor you are really turned into an actor in real life. You become this character that fits “their” script.

Hah! Look at me giving industry lessons. Excuse me *(Nkosi dissolves in a character. It is now that we ‘audience’ notice he is carrying a bible).*

**The character (Young pastor “subject to change”):** Greeting saints, it’s an honour to stand before you and praise the word of the Almighty. Bazalwane, we, all of us here today, are messengers of God, the almighty. Hallelujah bazalwane. *(He spins like Chris Brown).* Saints, the lord says: Spread…My word… *(he smiles)* …bazalwane, can I repeat that? The Lord says spread…My word, and I will give My blessings to you all. I want us all to close our eyes, look up to the sky and spread…the Word of Jesus.

Hallelujah!

**Nkosi:** Being an actor truly is a blessing. As an actor, you truly can be anyone you choose to be, you can do any profession. Actors are truly the most dangerous species, because they fit in everywhere. As dangerous as we are, we are endangered species as well.

Sometimes acting brings fame, and fame can be a disease, an infectious virus *(He drinks again).*

I did become the “character”. *(He drinks a little bit more).* I, mina, self, was a superstar. Ungangiboni ngihleli la, ngiphuza nani. Ngiyisidakwa (Don’t see me sitting here with you, looking like a drunkard). Mina, lo self, I am known throughout the world. Nkosi “the king” Nkabinde. I…I… *(He looks at the bottle again).*

You son of a bitch!! You fuckin’ son of a bitch! You win again! You fuckin’ win again! *(He throws the bottle across the stage, in hopes that it smashes on the pile of bottles).*

I am sorry did I scare you? *(Talking with audience)*

*(Silence)*

What happened to me? How did I get here? A drunk? A miserable bastard!

*(Pause)*

**Nkosi**: I am only 32, you know, I am in my prime. My best years should still be ahead of me. Look at me though? Looking like a hobbo. *(He smells himself)*

Did I even take a bath this morning? *(He grabs a bottle. Looks at it, and then pours the content over his head)*

Well there, bath taken.

*(Silence)*

**Nkosi:** I miss my kids. I miss them so much!! (*He sobs and drinks the left-over content. He looks at the bottle.)*

I hate the smell of alcohol. How do people drink this shit? It’s horrible!! It’s like horse piss, not that I have drank horse piss before, it’s a saying, but if I were to imagine, I would imagine it would taste like this.

*(Pause)*

I never liked alcohol. I still don’t. Ever since I was a kid, I hated it. I have bad memories with alcohol. Yeah! Yeah! Here comes the tragic life story, isn’t that what you’re thinking right now? Well, fuck you, but yes.

It was my mother! You probably didn’t expect that, but yes, it was my mother.

*Transition*

**Nkosi:** *(Sobered up actor)* My mother, bless her soul, was the bread winner at home. Well, she earned more than my dad ever could. My dad was a humble man. He was a respectable, kind man. My mother though never failed to remind him how useless of a man he was for not providing family needs, she always would say:

**The character (My mother):** “I am more man than you will ever be. Where are your balls?” My dad would just grab my hand and we’d walk away.

“Look at you, walking away, come fight me, come, nx!”

She was never like that you know; There was a time where we were very happy. I think my mom had psychological and emotional problems. My dad would take me to the top of the hill and we’d read a book. He knew the worse part was coming, because mom would stay at home and drink. When she drank, it was a lot, one time we found her passed out by the car, it was pure luck that she didn’t get in the car.

*(He takes a sip)*

She never used to drink, my mother, but I heard after she lost a baby, she used alcohol to fill a certain void. She hated my father, she would say “I fucking hate your calm face. It’s like you’re blaming me for it! It was not my fault!” When my dad would say “I know it’s not” it made things worse! So, he decided to rather keep quiet.

“She needs to vent it out,” he would say.

So, from that life, I hated liquor, the stench of it is vile. I hated even holding the bottle.

Hah! Look at me now. My life support, that’s a Sam Smith song.

My mom fell ill, she suffered from a liver infection. We mourned, but a part of us, maybe me, I don’t know, maybe my dad too, felt a sense of relief, well I thought.

I fuckin’ hate alcohol, it took a lot from me, it’s taking a lot from me, but I can’t stop, because it’s the only thing that numbs the pain, it’s the only thing that makes me forget.

It’s… *(He looks at the bottle. He takes a sip. He laughs. The laugh turns hysterical. He begins to sing a drunken song. Life Support by Sam Smith. He sings as he exits, followed by fadeout)*

**Chapter III**

**“Romeo and Juliet”**

**Nkosi:** *(Alive again. Energetic. Almost sober).* When I met her, my wife, I was at the peak of career. My father, in those days and nights where we walked off to the hill top, would say to me:

**The character (My Father):** Yabona my boy when you find her, isthandwa senhliziyo yakho (You see my boy when you find her. The one who your heart chooses). The one who is your rib. You’ll know, sometimes you won’t realize until you find yourself laughing or smiling when she creeps into your mind.

In your mind you will have all the confidence in the world to approach her and talk to her, but when she is here, right in front of you, it’s like the fear of God has struck you. Your heart will dance so much that you feel like it wants to dance outside your chest. The more she gets close to you, the more your heart pounds, but then finally you do talk to her, she will smile; her smile makes you breathe easier. Then there will be a time where she holds your hand, and your heart gets tamed. It beats a little less faster…then you’ll know.

**Nkosi:** He made it feel like meeting mom was a fairy tale. Something written off books, I would laugh and say that, baba engathi usufunda kakhulu (It seems like you have read a lot of romance novels dad) ama romance novels. He would hit me on the back of my head.

*Pause.*

Once I sober up, I need to call that man. Now that I am thinking of him, I should call him. My memory is bad, so please remind me *(Telling audience).*

So, I did meet her, Charity, I thought my dad was lying but the moment my eyes caught hers, I smiled, my heart for a second jumped out of my chest. I looked at her and thought she is the most beautiful thing I’ve ever laid my eyes on. She stood there, said her name and she laughed, I thought “Wow, those teeth are lovely.”

*(Nkosi breaks off from the thought)*

Teeth and a smile, very important things to me. If you have horrible… *(He looks at his teeth in the beer bottle).* If you have horrible teeth, it’s a turn off for me. Well, my teeth aren’t what they used to be either, but still, there is so much misery in the world, the last thing you need is a woman who can’t share a laugh with you.

You know the first time I tried to kiss her she shut me down. *(He laughs)* That bloody… *(He takes a drink still laughing).*

I fuckin hate her.

*(He looks at the bottle, almost as if it’s her).*

I fuckin’ hate you. I hate you!!!! *(He sobs again)* I hate you.

*Pause.*

You win! You win. What else do you want from me! You win again! Again! And again!! *(He pours the content on the floor. Then he does the unthinkable. He begins to dance in it, floor-dance. He sways in it with his whole body. It is disgusting and beautiful at the same time. He continuously, within intervals, utters you win again. Lights go out).*

**Chapter IV**

**“Being famous”**

**Nkosi “the king”:** When you are famous it’s like you are on a constant high. You feel elevated all the time. You feel like there is nothing you can’t have. When the money comes in, it’s like a new life comes with it. I thought I was prepared. You have to understand I had planned for fame or success since I was very young. The first time I watched a live theatre performance, I was taken, when one human created and became so many characters on stage, I could not believe my eyes. I was taken.

That moment confirmed that this thing was for me. So, I knew I’d be successful at it. I took it lightly. To think of it, I think it got worse when I transitioned from theatre to screen, then everyone knew who I was.

Honestly, I prefer stage than screen. I love both art forms, but it takes something else to be a stage performer.

Suddenly, there was nowhere I could walk without someone stopping me for a picture. I was being invited to speak here and there, being paid to pose with this and that, but of course, at the words of “the industry”.

You cannot shit and wipe with any toilet paper. ‘The industry” will tell you which toilet paper to use and buy. You cannot just buy any drink, no! no! no! you must be seen drinking this, not that *(He pushes the bottle to audience view)* Hah! Well not this, I mean *(He takes a sip).*

If I used the word puppet, you’d get the picture, but that only happens when “they” care about you, when you are relevant and making money for them.

*Pause (He looks hard at the bottle)*

I was relevant once. Every girl wanted to pull their skirts up for me, even men wanted to be me, you know. I was it. I dare to say, I indulged. In women. Regrettably. One of the worse mistakes of my life *(He takes a sip).* A huge mistake *(Drinks again).* Because my wife… Heh, life throws these things at you, I mean what do you do, it’s not like someone prepares you for this life. It’s not like there is a manual that says ‘This is what’s going to happen in your life’

I remember this one time. I was in the club, VIP booth, of course. A bottle of water on my table, but I was still calling rounds like I was drinking.

Out of the corner of my eye. I see this beautiful chick. I stare at her. She stares back. She smiles and bites her lip.

I had this feeling, it wasn’t the same as with my wife, nope, but it was more like a rush. A surge, that went straight to my penis. Next minute. We are at the back seat of my car, and she’s screaming like a porn star.

Listen, too much screaming can be annoying and a turn off, but let’s be honest, sometimes the screaming and the moaning that happens during sex is the driving force in enjoying it.

Correct me if I am wrong? *(Speaking to the audience).* And she was trained in it. We didn’t have just one round, ones like her, you must make sure they remember you as much as the mere idea of fucking you is enough.

So, we went at it again. I think I had no more condoms at one point, so I… *(He sips. He gulps).*

*(His mood changes. Nkosi is breathing differently. He is sitting properly. He is agitated. We see this by his foot. He takes a deep breath)*

Beat 3

**Nkosi:** The moment you decide to go for an HIV test as a person, you feel the fear. You throw questions at yourself; what if I have? What will be next if I do? No matter how safely you guard yourself. The thought creeps into your head, you start to ask yourself, what if that one time…Oh fuck!

I was sitting across the nurse, watching her pull that HIV test tool. I wanted to turn and walk away. I looked at her. She was talking, all I saw was her lips moving. I saw her gesturing for my finger. I kept my calm, handed her my finger, she held it, squeezed it and smiled, ahh! Women can you not see my situation. She was flirting, and all I was thinking was “It’s this that got me here in the first place,” and she pricked it. That thing is fucking painful, it’s just a prick, but damn.

It seemed like hours passed. After a while, she looked at the thing and said one of the most dreadful statements.

“Vele, you are expecting any type of results?”

I looked at her. What the fuck did she see there? “Yeah” I said. She smiled and showed me “You are negative”

When I walked out, I went straight to the shop, bought 3 packs of condoms. I swore to never, ever do such a mistake ever again.

*(He comes back to his self. He signs heavily)*

That was the mistake I made wasn’t it. Swearing to not make the mistake of fucking a random girl without protection, not swearing that I would not cheat on my wife again.

*(He looks at the bottle)*

**Nkosi:** Look at you! It’s not like you’re listening, or like you even care about my problems. I keep coming back to you, I am fighting a losing battle, because you win again don’t you.

*(As he gulps, the lights slowly fade to black).*

**Chapter V**

**“Stage Charm”**

**Nkosi:** Chapter Thirteen of Stanislavski’s *Building a character* speaks about Stage Charm. It says there are those performers or actors that walk into the stage and audience is absolutely enthralled by them. It says sometimes that charm exerts even when s/he does nothing but stand on stage. I think I had that, I used to be able to stand on stage and forget the lights, the audience, the props, I forgot all of it and just became. Isn’t that real acting, what theatre is, to be present.

*Pause.*

Let me tell you something

Being an actor and being famous are two distinctively different, but similar things. One is pretending your own life and the other is playing these different lives. It sounds arbitrary right? But like I said, I love being on stage. There is something about being on stage that makes you naked, I mean truly naked. You know when you are naked, you are exposed, every stretch mark, every birth mark, your skin, your flaws…everything, when you imbue yourself in acting that’s the feeling you get. That feeling of being free of the things that hold you down.

There is this thing that acting does, it makes you wear someone’s skin. In wearing that skin, you feel a part of it belongs to you. Some part of that character is you. Don’t get me wrong, I am not saying now if you’re playing a serial killer then part of you is one.

But… we are all evil sometimes, aren’t we? That’s the evil your character draws from, the evil that you think of, I mean a writer can go so far as to write a character or character description, but that essence of the character comes from you.

I remember one of my favourite characters that I had to play on stage; he never said much at all, it was the authentic nature of his gesture and physicality. *(Nkosi slowly transforms into the character. After de-roling, finishing with the acting he speaks).* It was *Outa* from Boesman and Lena (Any character can be chosen as reference)

*(Pause. He drinks)*

In this acting business you draw from somewhere, don’t you? You draw these characters from experience and life. It’s a great career this, this thing here, on stage.

**Chapter VI**

**“The tribe”**

*(Nkosi stands on a spotlight. He is poised, ready and reciting the monologue).*

**The character**: Many think I am for the poor, that I will never come for them, but I am walking with two legs amongst you. Laughing at your jokes. You think I am not coming for you, I am.

What?

You think because you are cautious, I will not come for you? Do you think those whose company I enjoy are only the foolish? Well you are wrong.

Your time is coming, I am coming especially for you.

**Nkosi**: I get emotional when I start to speak about my family, I mean my family; My wife and kids, family. So, excuse me *(He gets a hiccup)*

I mean I don’t think I even know how to start it.

We didn’t know we were going to have twins. After, my wife, Charity told me we were expecting, I cried. I didn’t know if it was from the guilt or too much joy. I think it was both.

I hugged her and told her I was sorry. She held me and said, she knows.

I was a new man. I was gonna be a father, of two????? Twins. *(He holds in his hand two bottle of beer now. He gulps on both).*

*(In a drunken state, he continues to speak)*

Remember when I told you about…. About…what did I tell you kambe? Ahhh damnit! You *(Pointing at an audience member).* What did I tell you? ... What? Ahh it’s either I am super drunk right now or I don’t remember.

Oh yes!!! Emotions. How certain feelings and emotions can drive people to be at their best. Well, uhmm… I was at the top of my game during her period of pregnancy! Every show…. I was on stage like…. *(Trying to stand upright. Looking down)*

“To be, or not to be, that is the question” wait is that even a question? “To be, or not to be…to be…or not… *(He falls and lies there. Sobbing. He becomes calm after)*

**Beat 4**

**Nkosi:** On the 28th of March, Charity gave birth to twins, a boy and a girl. We named them Ayanda and Amanda. Ironically the girl looked like me, and the boy like his mother. Zozidla ingane loyamfana (He will be a trouble with girls this one) *(He interrupts himself with a song from the soil, family. He sings and hums it).*

I always wonder what I could’ve been if I wasn’t an actor? Was my life meant for just acting, or I could’ve been like a doctor. You know how parents are with wanting you to be a doctor or lawyer. Jobs where money is guaranteed.

Hah!

It used to be like that, wasn’t it? Degree guarantees you a job; Well, not anymore.

*Pause*

My dad thought I’d make a great writer, he would say I have the mind of a creator, I kind of did become a great writer, didn’t I? Well, instead of a pen, I write with my body and my voice. Hah! *(He drinks)*

I wonder where my dad is. After mom died, he, kind of changed, not for the worse nor better, he just seemed different. He was in limbo, I guess, I think mom was the light of his life.

There is something about being in love isn’t there, when someone really means that much to you, that telling them is almost stupid because they won’t get it. And when that person leaves, it shatters you. It’s like a black hole in your heart that never gets filled.

I should call my dad. Ask if he is okay, maybe after these few bottles I will.

*(He takes a drink. In the fade out, he speaks)*

Why don’t you just kill me already? Take my life, it’s useless now anyways. Take it!!!!

**Chapter VII**

**“A crownless king”**

**Nkosi**: I am alive, but I have no dreams nor vision. I only have a purpose.

When my mother was drowning in emotions, she gave signs. It was my father who saw that she was drowning. I didn’t even notice, I was young. She was drowning and the only way she thought she could get out was to drink her way out.

It started when dad moved to the guest bedroom. ‘She just needs space and time’, my dad told me. She will be fine. Then I would hear crying, I thought they were fighting, but I once saw dad, tucking mom in the bed, he was all clawed up on his face. Sometimes random screams and sometimes sobbing, my dad would again take me on a walk.

“Your mom just needs some alone time, mfanami”

It was hurting dad that he couldn’t do anything, that everything he did seemed wrong.

Mom was in pain. It was hurtful, her pain was emotional. When the drinking started, things seemed to calm down, but then the swearing, the breaking of stuff. The stench of alcohol and the vomiting!

These were signs; Mom was pleading and asking for help. Finally, it seemed she got better, dad kept being there until she got better, but then she got sick, I mean sick and things got from bad to worse.

*Pause*

I think both knew that she was not gonna make it. My mom made peace with it, dad on the other hand began to drown, but he wasn’t willing to let it show. I only saw it because on our walks and sits, he would stare at the distance, I would talk for minutes and he’d only respond with “Is that so? I hear you mfanami”

Which didn’t make sense when I asked questions.

When it finally happened, when she died. After the funeral, my dad took a walk with me and we sat, reading a letter she had left for us.

The letter:

**Mother**: I am sorry to both of you. I got lost, I know you never gave up on me, you kept looking for me. I didn’t make it easier for you to find me. I am glad you never lost hope that you would find me. I didn’t think anyone would find me, but you did. So, thank you.

I am sorry I wasn’t what I used to be when you found me. I now know that I was never alone in my grief, it’s a pity I realised too late.

I love you both so very much, please take care of each other. If there is a heaven, and it’s a place I can enter, I will surely look after both of you.

Love mom.

**Nkosi:** I think the letter was more for my dad than it was for me. It would be later in life that it got me.

**Beat 5**

**Nkosi**: It was a curse, maybe a passed down curse. I don’t know. After the twins were 2 years old, Charity was pregnant again. I mean our sex life was on fire. It was a baby boy.

*Pause.*

A boy *(He drinks from his bottle; he looks at it).* I hate you! Do you hear me!!! I hate you! *(He drinks again).*

While she, Charity was driving back from the shopping centre.

*Pause*. A boy.

She felt a sharp pain in her belly.

*Pause*. A boy.

She called me from the house. I met her and drove her to the hospital as quickly as I could.

*Pause.* My baby boy.

When we got there, doctor told us. We lost the baby.

“Everything was fine! What happened?? We were fine!” “Sometimes it happens”

Long pause. *(Nkosi drinks. Hiccups)*

After that, she started drinking. And suddenly an image of my mother popped into my head.

It got worse. The drinking. There was yelling, old wounds were open about cheating

*Pause*

And then worst possible thing happened. I received one of the worse possible calls in my entire life.

A car accident.

*Pause.*

Charity and my kids died in a crash. Charity had been drinking.

*Long pause.*

I had told her not to drive with the kids ever!!

*Pause*

My soul died on that phone call. That day I died too. I took the blame on myself. I should have seen the signs. I grew up with these signs. My dad told me “Mfanami, your wife needs you, you need to be there for her.”

I didn’t listen. I… it was my fault. I could have… I should’ve

*Pause.*

So, I had nothing. The life I had seemed empty. I was angry. I was sad… I was… I needed to forget. So, one day while browsing in the wardrobe, I found her stash. Alcohol. I smashed it but it didn’t seem to heal the pain I had. So, I drunk it.

Pause

Somehow, I felt numb, so I kept drinking. *(He drinks)*

*Pause*

I started slacking off. Nobody wanted to work with me. I was placed in rehabs, but that all just reminded me that I was nobody anymore, so I drunk even more.

I kept on drinking for 3 years, but still couldn’t numb the pain, alcohol was winning. It took my family and now here I was trying to see if I could beat it, but it was… winning

I drank and drank, kept drinking then one day.

*Pause (Codex by Radiohead plays in the background)*

I woke up in my bed, not my bed in my house, but my bed at home where I grew up. How did I get here, I asked myself?

Then I walked outside and there he was, my dad, sitting on his chair and reading a book (too cliché?) Without even looking at me he asked how I was feeling? I asked how did I get here? (He laughed).

It turns out for the whole 3 years that I had been drinking, it was my dad who fetched me in the tavern. He would find me drowning in alcohol or vomit. He’d pick me up, bathe me and tuck me in, then when he woke up in the morning, I would be gone then the cycle would repeat.

He gave me an old folded letter. The moment I grabbed it; I knew what it was.

**Dad:** I will be here for you mfanami, just like I was there for your mother. It is my hope that I can be able to save you son. I don’t want to lose someone I love to alcohol again.

**Nkosi:** It was my mom’s letter.

*Pause*

What happens when you suddenly wake up from a nightmare or reality, and realise, you’re not the person you wanted to be. Asking yourself where did your life go?

It’s been 3 years since that day, it took me a long time but after the letter I told myself, I don’t want to be lost anymore, I want to find myself. Therefore, I am here today, sharing with you people. I think after a long time battling with the bottle, I realised that holding it gave it power to defeat me. I realised that it was putting it down that finally made me stand a chance. Some of us it’s not the bottle they are battling with, some it’s jobs, some it’s stagnation, some it’s trying to get degrees, illness and some loss.

*Pause*

It’s not great waking up from a nightmare and wondering where did your life go? What did you do with your life?

I am here because I don’t want to wonder anymore

*(He looks at the bottle. Gives a huge sigh)*

I win.

*(He leaves it and walks out)*

The end