



## **ZUHURA.**

**A collection of short stories on the theme of love.**

This book was compiled by Gasheri Gichunge. It contains the works of [babjy.wordpress.com](http://babjy.wordpress.com), [shadtherackster.wordpress.com](http://shadtherackster.wordpress.com), [feelingthegaps.wordpress.com](http://feelingthegaps.wordpress.com), [damaville.wordpress.com](http://damaville.wordpress.com) [rapando.co.ke](http://rapando.co.ke), [chingano.com](http://chingano.com) [rapando.co.ke](http://rapando.co.ke), and [gasheri.co.ke](http://gasheri.co.ke).

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## **Introduction.**

Zuhura anthology is a collection of seven short stories on the theme love from seven writers from Kenya.

Zuhura is a Kiswahili name for Venus, the Greek goddess of beauty who was the mother of cupid.

Each of these love stories tells of a different dimension of love for the simple reason we all harbor a latent ability to love. An ability ingrained in our DNA, one we can't shake off try as we might.

Thus we go through life haggling with love as though currency. Love becomes the basis on which we either hold closer or let go; our sacred creed.

On account of love we go to war and when we are wounded it becomes the balm that covers our lesions and makes us whole again.

We get broken by love and still by it we are made whole again, such is life.

We hope you Love the collection.

Enjoy!

## A Sequence of Events.

### *This is what happens...*

The mirror shifts as you dress; you silently curse your brother, dude forgot to fix it after he had used it in another of his many stupid experiments. The body-con hugs every part of your body. You like that, the only problem is that your tummy is a little bit bloated. That's what happens when you decide to spend the weekend binging on Swiss rolls, ice cream, kilograms of cheese and onion flavored crisps. You remove the dress, throw it on the bed and grab another. This takes thirty minutes, the dressing. The cycle goes from liking the dress in the closet, putting it on, liking it momentarily to suddenly hating how it brings out your legs, or your ass, or your bloated tummy.

You wonder if your effort is worth it, looking for the perfect dress for the date. You wonder if you should just cancel it. You have done that so many times it'll be easier than finding the right dress. You sit on the bed and scroll down the contacts to his name. You look at the picture he used as his contact photo. It was on his birthday when you took that photo of him. You were taking a walk just within the estate and you took the photo under one of the street lights. He is the most handsome man you have ever known. His sexiness exudes even from the photo.

You run your thumb on the outline of his lips. You sigh, put the phone down and get back to the task at hand. You need to find that dress.

### *Later...*

The restaurant is roughly thirty minutes away from your house. So you leave an hour earlier, leaving an allowance for traffic and any other circumstance that may make you late. You do not want to be late today. You look great. You found the perfect dress and the kind of heels that just blend with the colors. Your lips are a shade of red, luscious, you would like to think. Your perfectly manicured fingers hug the miniature clutch purse is in your hand. You outdid yourself today. Atta girl. It better be worth it.

When you arrive, he is not there yet. You find a table at the corner and tell the waiter you are not ready to order, you are waiting for your date. He smiles and compliments you. You smile back and thank him. Another thirty minutes go by; you check your phone, no call. No text. You skim through the last conversation you had to confirm that you really agreed on 8:00 pm. You wonder whether to call him and decide against it. You will wait. God knows your patience *overfloweth*.

The waiter passes by again. Asks if you would like anything, water maybe? You say hot water would be fine. He goes and comes back with it. He looks at you and cautiously asks, 'he running late?' You nod and stare at the steam rising from the water. He walks away without saying anything. You don't take your eyes off the steam. You place your hand above the glass of water and the steam burns your hand but you do not take it away, you feel the warmth spreading all over your body; the palm of your hand burns but you do not care. You let some of the steam condense on your hand before pulling your hand away and wiping the water off. You are nervous. You feel flushed so you go to the bathroom to freshen up.

It's been an hour. You haven't taken a sip of the water you were served. You are sure it is already cold by now. You check your phone again. This time you decide to text 'where are you?' You see as the message gets delivered. You put your phone away before you can see if it has been read or not. The waiter passes by and smiles at you. You smile back, wait for another ten minutes then you leave. Once outside, you check your phone again, your message was read. You call for an Uber and head home.

It was never worth it.

### ***What will happen...***

Sorrow surrounds you like a heavy blanket on cold July nights. You would like to think that the heaviness of it all gives you warmth but all it does is feed on your emotions until finally you are just an empty shell; a Pandora's Box of paradoxes, feeling everything and feeling nothing at the same time. You confuse yourself; you can never get the hang of your feelings. When you do, you either feel too much or too little. You never thought there would be a time in your life when you would be wishing for a bit of moderation, a slow-down. Is it possible to feel, just... averagely?

What sound can perfectly describe that one of your heart breaking? Is it a shattering sound, a thud maybe or just a pop, like a bubble? You have felt heartbroken so many times it doesn't feel real anymore. The phrase 'break up' makes you think about glasses, and windowpanes; glasses falling from the top shelves, windowpanes hit by stones thrown by rogue kids from the neighborhood. Sometimes, it makes you think of the scar on your left foot and you remember the day hot oil scalded the flesh. How, for a minute you didn't feel anything, you just stared at your foot, wondering what exactly people did when they got burned. What is the first aid protocol on burns? You wondered how come you knew nothing about something you felt should be basic knowledge. When the pain hit, it was so intense you felt as if every part of your body had stopped functioning for a moment. The phrase 'break up' makes you think about how the next few days you watched pieces of skin

tear away from the burnt part of your foot. It took you a week to realize you needed some medical help. The phrase 'break up' makes you think about shattered windowpanes and broken glasses.

And love, love nauseates you. It makes all the contents of your stomach seek an exit from your body. It also scares the hell out of you. You think of love as the best and worst days of your life, all rolled into one. You think of love the way you think of purgatory- the realm between heaven and hell. Many people are skeptical about its existence while others are certain of it and even dedicate some prayers for people in purgatory. How many times has love reduced you to a vulnerable little -would-do -anything -for- you- kind of person. For how long has it rendered you helpless on the floor of your bedroom crying your heart out on the shoulder of your best friend? How many times has love morphed you to an angry I-hate- you-I'm-thinking-of- a-million- ways- to- kill -you kind of girl? And even worse, how many times has love surrendered you in the arms of oblivious bliss?

How many times has love promised you and then fucked you over? And then over again? How many times?

Love, love makes you think about your crazy uncle. The man who had a lot of potential but somewhere along the line he found solace at the bottom of the bottle and on one end of the joint. Now he is just an entity of hallucinations, broken dreams and a myriad of addictions.

### ***Sidebar...***

Here is a list of the things you don't know about:

The first time you met him, at the movie shop down the street, he was just from the hospital. His wife had just given birth and the whole experience overwhelmed him, so when he got his family back home he needed to watch something to relax. You also needed something to watch after a week of failed laboratory experiments and denied grants.

He looked at you and smiled.

'Hey'

You smiled back and *hey-ed* him.

'What's your poison?' He asked. And you thought *whisky*. But said 'comedy'

'A good laugh, huh?'

'Always works'

That is the day you gave him your number.

He is married and a father of two kids.

I could have began with that. But I'm one for the dramatic nuances.

He fell in love with you way before you met. He'd seen you a few times before. You might even argue that his arrival at the movie place was not just coincidental. Maybe he knew he would find you; a little bit creepy but completely acceptable in your book of Romantic Gestures and Moves.

What you know is that you couldn't stop thinking about his smile that day. And how when he asked about your poison you wanted to tell him about your love for music, coffee, the occasional shot of whisky, a good laugh and always, always, a great book. You wanted to tell him how he probably would make a good muse for you-A source of inspiration.

On his birthday, he'd had a fight with his wife and he had left the house to clear his head when he called for the first time since that day at the movie place. You agreed to take a walk with him and he told you about his work and that it was his birthday. You told him about your blog. He said he would check it out sometime. After you took his picture under the street light he took one of you with your phone.

He loves you. He really does. You don't know this. He also loves his wife. On the day he stood you up, remember, the day you wore the perfect dress and heels and wore that shade of lipstick that brings out the fullness of your lips? His wife had just found out about you, she had seen the text messages and the pictures you sent him. So while you were burning the palm of your hand with the steam from the glass of water you had been served in an attempt to quell your frustration, his wife was walking out on him, calling him names and others that were meant for you. He pleaded for mercy, apologized profusely, said he would get rid of you, that nothing had actually happened between you two (which were true at that moment). She calmed down at the mention of that, but being a woman scorned, her fury needed more than that. She said she would need space away from him and went to stay with her mum for a while.

When you texted him, he read your text almost immediately. He thought of texting you back and apologizing but stopped himself. He thought about his kids. He felt guilty. He smashed the phone on the wall.

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This is what you know:

When you think of him, several things come to mind. The word love leads the entourage. The word enigma comes to mind. The word sex comes to mind. The words frozen, martyr and façade come to mind.

To you, he is a dark alley of desires; Imponderable ones.

***This is what happens...***

When you get home, you take off your heels and the dress, wipe off the makeup from your face and sigh. You look at your image in your bra and underwear on the shifting mirror. Its movement angers you and you walk to the kitchen, make yourself a cup of coffee as you pick up from where you left with Liane Moriarty's *Big Little Lies*. You sit on the floor of your living room and read your desperation away.

At the dead of the night, your phone rings. He is calling. You look at the top right of your phone, 1:17 am. You take two seconds to decide whether to pick up or not. He says he is

right outside your house. He had never been to your place before but he knows where it is, so you are not surprised. You put on an oversized t-shirt and open the door. He looks pained .Angry even. He is using an old phone. As you let him in you ask.

‘What happened? Where is your phone?’

He doesn’t reply.

That night, he whispers he loves you, and a few seconds later that he is sorry. That night you cannot sleep. Long after he sleeps, the words hang around the room, sucking out the air. You cannot breath. In the morning, you wake him up to ask him what happened and what he meant by those words, but you tell him ‘it’s nothing, go back to sleep’. You wait until his breathing becomes gentle and steady again before slipping out of bed and preparing for work. You leave him at your place but when you come back he is gone.

You delete his contacts and the ‘under the streetlight’ picture. You cry.

You think about the sound of your heart breaking and the phrase ‘break up’. You think about love.

When you think about love, you think about him.

When you think about frozen, façade, enigma, strong, martyr, sex, dark alleys of imponderable desires and love, you think of him.

Is there a way one can just feel... averagely?

**By dee- [damaville.wordpress.com](http://damaville.wordpress.com)**



## You will love

*“The court has found you guilty of murder. You are sentenced to life imprisonment...”*

She remembers these words vividly. They're still fresh in her mind even after nineteen years. She recalls how she couldn't believe those words, how it was like reverie, how her mind crumbled to desolation after hearing that. She didn't bother to hear the rest of what the judge had to say.

Her name is Lola, daughter of a church minister.

She remembers how her lawyer whispered to her, *'we did our best, sorry'* after the verdict. She was too shocked to be mad. After all, how did one end up with a life imprisonment punishment for something they didn't do? Could it have been an indication of a failed judicial system or was it sheer bad luck?

She had been framed up for killing her employer. A framing so perfect she almost admired it even in the terror of facing prison. She was mentally prepared to do some time. But not a life sentence, no one's prepared for those.

She remembers how they cuffed and transported her to a maximum prison, still in awe, not wanting to believe what was happening to her. It was surreal. Like a scene from a crime drama flick.

She sobbed through her first night as her cell mates jeered and laughed at her. She cursed and lamented against God. A God who had abandoned her even after serving Him more than most people do in their lifetime. Slowly she adjusted.

After nineteen years, she had found a home around the 15-foot walls. She was comfortable. She had been re-introduced to the Lord and had fallen in Love with him again. So much so she turned a woman of the cloth. She was now fondly addressed as *Mama Kanisa* (Swahili for 'mother of the church') around the prison cells.

And now she was leaving 'home'; President's pardon, the bleak hope life convicts clutched onto for freedom.

In all those years, she had dreamt of getting out; how she'd put on the red dress they had taken from her when they gave her the black and white uniform. How she would find a nice spot (preferably under a beautiful tree that sheds its leaves), sit and savor the freedom she had so long been waiting for.

But now it wasn't all that. Maybe it's because of all the friends she'd leave behind. Friends she would die for, family. Or maybe it was the reality check hitting her like a bad hangover. She had nowhere to go to and no one to go to. She was alone.

The last visitor she had had after serving a year was her aunt; the only one who believed in her innocence all that time. Her parents had long disowned her. *Our family does not condone murder. You've tainted our name*, said daddy. So much for being a minister, eh?

How do you press play on life after it had been paused for two decades? How do you catch up? Where do you get a job let alone money? How do you adjust to this fast-moving 21<sup>st</sup> century city life when you left it dull, uneventful and desolate back in the 90s? It's hard; a dog's life.

Such questions are ones that left her falling into a dark cesspit of depression just a month into her freedom. In her small beat up room she would stare into the darkness and scream perpetually. Thoughts of suicide weighed in on her. It had started as a passing thought but had now morphed into her focal thoughts, thinking about it before she slept, waking up to it and staying with it as she went on her hustle of being a street fruit vendor.

When she was locked out of her place for not making rent, she had had enough of life. To hell with all those people that say 'when life gives you lemons, make lemonade.'

She decided that night she would end it all. Be done with it once and for all.

It was the only way, a shortcut; skipping to the end. She would be just another statistic in annual suicide death count releases. But she'd rather be that than continue with her deadbeat life.

A rope, a high ceiling, a chair and that was it. But there was a silver lining to all of this, one she had to take on her plan to see.

At 10pm, after taking few shots of cheap liquor, she headed home to go get it over with. And what better place to end it than the laundry room to finally wash away your pain?

The guard watched her, scrutinizing her movements. He knew something was up. That's why he followed her and saw her hanging, shaking violently as life escaped her body. But it wasn't her day, Juma was there, and he cut the rope before the angel of death could part with yet another soul.

That's how their love story started. Because after that, Juma was all she had. He was the only one that visited her as she recuperated and went through counselling sessions. He brought her food and get well cards with dry witty jokes. She loved them, the jokes. She still couldn't fathom the idea of someone doting her, someone appreciating her. She was too damaged for that. And even worse, she hated the fact that she felt the same way for him too.

Slowly and subtly, she loved loving him. She loved his presence. She loved how he stroked his beard gently when he made a silly joke. She loved the depth of his voice, how it reverberated in their small digs as he told her stories of his days in the police force. But she loved him most for reconnecting her to the world.

Juma, a widower with no kids, had been single since the death of his wife a few years back. He thought (knew) he couldn't love again. Not after the death of his amazing wife. Love had failed him and he wasn't willing to take another shot at failure. And after they laid him off at the police after a permanent back injury, it also was downhill for him. Drinking and drowning his sorrows in the bottle. Until he found Christ and later a job as the night guard in Lola's apartment building.

As for Lola, she had one serious relationship before prison that ended in heartaches. She couldn't trust anyone again, at least not a man. They're all dogs, she would say. It's amazing how two people with so much baggage would come together.

After Lola was discharged, she had nowhere to go. Juma (who was smitten at this point) offered her a place to stay. A nice small house he was allocated close to the building he was guarding.

She would sleep on the bed and him on the couch. She would work as a grocer by day and cook him dinner before he left to guard by night. She would invite him to sleep on the bed because after all, it was his house but he always refused.

Slowly she idolized Juma; this man that would opt to leave the house for her to feel safe when she was getting naked for a change of clothes. They call him and his ilk gentlemen. And she knew she had found herself a catch. She had never felt this way before. Not with anybody. Not even in prison when they brought in a young Somali warden they all had a crush on. She had found her 'the one'. Cheesy but true.

They started eating out without calling them dates because calling them would ruin the ideal dynamic they had going on. Going to church together became a thing. They were mistaken for a couple more times than politicians lie to make better on their promises.

Until finally Juma called it a date and they confessed all those profound feelings that were lurking inside them. Later that night he finally agreed to share his bed.

It didn't stop there. They got engaged. Life took a turn for both of them. Because that is what a good relationship does. It builds you and makes you a better person. Or at least, makes you try to become one. Juma got a better job at a private security firm. Lola's business soared higher into profitability. She expanded and started selling and distributing fresh fruit juice. Love came through for them.

It's uncanny how two people's stars can align for them to meet, two people from extremities meeting and caring for each other. It's beautiful, love. It heals. It soothes. It nourishes. It sees past the flaws we have. It doesn't recognize race, ethnicity or tribe. And the best thing about it, it's never too late to find it. It's the greatest feeling and although it may blind us, it gives us the hope and courage to surge forward confidently.

Don't worry if you still haven't found that right person. They're coming as fast as they can. And when they arrive, you will love.

**By Simon: [feelingthegaps.wordpress.com](http://feelingthegaps.wordpress.com)**

## VEE.

### TEN MONTHS AGO...

I placed the receiver down, adjusted my tie, cleared my throat before I took a sip of juice I had in a glass on the table. I had to play smart. I had just burned a bridge and I risked losing a friend, a woman or both. I chose to lose the former; we can always make new friends, as for women, women... I took another sip. Still, the sugary juice would not replace the acidic taste in my mouth. I feigned confidence, looked at my watch and smiled, it was time to leave the office. But I had to call Sam first. Poor son of a peasant had sent me some airtime to carry out his assignment, and I had done it perfectly well. I dialed his number.

“Hey bro, ulifaulu?” he asked even before waiting for my voice. I was still looking for the best voice. I cleared my throat again, the way a doctor would do before breaking to a couple that one of them was HIV positive.

“Sam, let that slut go. You’ve got many women man,” I said. Silence.

“So who did she say?”

He asked imploringly. And i felt the dejection in a brother’s voice. But I had to keep the number one commandment of a liar; never back off from a lie you’ve told.

I bit my lower lip and replied,

“Paul”

“Paul?” he asked,

“Paul Omollo” I confirmed

Look man, you can take Lavender, you guys make a great couple,” I cleared my throat again.

“Thanks Bobby. You’ve at last helped solve my riddle,” his injured voice said from the other end.

I didn’t want to listen to more of this, so I thought of telling him I was running out of airtime but again I would look weird. He’d sent me a hundred-shilling airtime. I just listened as he narrated how he had loved Vee, how he had invited her over during the long holidays but she wouldn’t come and that wasn’t at their home, he almost cried.

I am a good friend, I listened. I whispered the hundred and ninety-time 'It's okay, these whores ain't loyal bruh' when my phone finally warned me of my airtime running low I asked,

"Can we catch up later bruh, my airtime is up"

"It's okay man. You're a real brother. Can I call you back, if you don't mind?"

"Uhm, it's okay man," I answered.

Sam wanted someone to talk to, badly. And the moment presented me. I am not the best actor but look, when there's no alternative you gamble. I gambled. He didn't call back immediately, but two hours later telling me how he thought he'd had airtime only to find that auntie from the other end telling him to top up his account.

"Bullshit!" he shouted.

"You know problem with these women? He asked when he resumed venting.

"Ever since Beyoncé told them that they run this world, they want us to run mad. Imagine Vee, imagine that woman, Imagine..."

He was drunk. Very drunk, and if I gave him a second, he'd make it a minute, then an hour, then the whole night would be spent on a one-way conversation with a drunk. I had no time.

"Bro, uko sawa?" I asked.

"You know Sam, you're my home boy. I've seen you grow from nothing to a man of substance.

We've come from far man. You're like my brother," I said which Sam answered with a mouthful of laughter.

I'm sure he caressed his flat belly. I laughed as well, and then pressed the red button on my phone- call ended. Let me tell you about Sam.

### **LAST NIGHT...**

I had just come from the gym. I go to the gym every evening of a weekday. On weekends I catch a game with my boys and sometimes with le princess. It's a nice feeling, great routine, healthy way of life. I have new friends, the old ones became enemies, but that's what life is. As a giraffe grows, so does its food change. I lost many friends. I lost Sam. Let me tell you about Sam.

A very unromantic guy, Sam. Ever since I knew Sam, back in college, he's had flings with ladies whom he only broke up with few months later. He missed the dating memo and it's not in his DNA to treat ladies right.

One day we took some lasses from our class (in college) out for a dinner. That day I knew Sam's dating game was on an all time low. His father is a personal assistant to some politician and that spells money. Sam sponsored most of our trips with women outside the school. He brought the money, and I brought the swag which brought the women. And on this day, we had a woman each. I held my missus's hand, carried her bag on the other hand and when we arrived at the targeted restaurant, I pulled her a seat. Sam pulled his own sat down and then got on his phone.

You can't teach a man how to love, or show affection, or even fake orgasm. Never, these things are inborn. I let sleeping dogs lie.

But Sam did one big mistake- he hit on my sister.

"I thought we were boys Sam!" I shouted when I entered to find my sister pulling herself from Sam's strong hand in our sitting room. Sam looked down. He kept silent, as my sister hurried to her room. I was mad. Sam had missed all his targets and now he had seen it fine to try my sister?? Well, I knew he was suffering in his dry spell, and he had money. I wanted to shout at him, that there are places in town he could lay a woman with his money but not my father's house, when suddenly mommy called. She was just outside and needed help with loading the electricity tokens.

"I'm sorry man. It's not what you're thinking," he finally shot the words as I headed for the door.

"We know what that means when we tell our women," I retorted as I walked out.

When I came back, he was nowhere, he had left. He was ashamed he had broken one of the boys' codes- THOU SHALL NOT HIT ON MY SISTER.

He never called, till a year ago. Said he had a deal, and asked if we'd catch some breeze and Nyam chom at Lake House Grill. He said had a new catch, Vee.

"I knew you will bring a lady" I joked as I agreed to meet him the coming Saturday. On that Saturday, we got back to talking terms. But I had other plans. A month later, he called again. This time, he was hurt. And this time, I cast the fish net.

Sam: Hey man, are you in your crib?

Me: No man got a heap of work. I'll be late today.

Sam: man, I feel Vee is playing me man.

Me: Playing you! What do you mean?

Sam: Yeah man. I really feel so. She has been on long holiday but didn't come over. And she wasn't at their home, I'm worried.

Me: So, how do we do this?

Sam: Come on man, I should ask you that. You're the love-doctor.

Me: Okay. Give me her number, I'll call her and lie that I was calling from penzimoto.com and that her number was randomly selected for a dinner with her boyfriend this coming valentine. If she says your name, fine if she doesn't then you would know.

Sam was elated. He wouldn't even let me finish the statement. He was ready to send me Vee's number and some airtime to make it all possible. And he did, never disappoints financially able Sam. I got the airtime; I got the beauty's number.

Last night I came from the gym, headed straight to the shower before heading to kitchen; typical bachelor. Afterwards I'd catch the latest episode of 'Love and Hip Hop', read a page or two of 'The Have's and Have Not's' before going to bed. Then I heard my phone vibrate. I had six missed calls, two messages and one voice message.

Six missed calls and two messages from Vee baby. One read 'Pick the phone hunkie, labor pains'. I wouldn't want to listen to the voice message. I knew it was Vee. I called back immediately.

"Hey, Bobby"

This is Vee's sister. She is going to theatre in a few minutes. Please rush."

I dropped my towel. I really didn't need to shower. Can an expectant father die because he skipped just an evening's shower? No, thank you. How did we get here?

**TEN MONTHS AGO...**

When Sam gave me her missus' number, I took it with both hands. I called the number and placed the receiver on my ear as I cleared my throat.

Me: Hey Vee, it's me Bobby.

Vee: Bobby?

Me: Yes, Bobby, you don't remember Bobby?



Vee: Oh. Bobby, you mean Bobby, met at Lake House Grill?

Me: Yes, that one. How've you been?

Vee: I'm good, missing you. How've you been?

Me: I'm okay. I missed you too.

Vee: How's Sam?

Me: I should be asking you that. Sam and I don't really get along.

Vee: Yeah, he told me something about it. You guys have a beef or something?

Me: Not really, Sam just ain't my type. I just couldn't get along with him. Kwani you guys ain't together anymore?

Vee: no, I just can't do him. He's been calling me, Kwani how did you get my number?

Me: Si I got it from this whatsapp group you're with a friend. Lenny, you know Lenny?

Vee: I don't.

Me: Maybe when we meet I'll show you. Are you in town?

Vee: Yeah, came last weekend.

Me: How about a dinner next weekend?

Vee: Gosh! Can't wait.

That was that. I sealed the deal and since it was approaching end-month, I put my best foot forward. Called Sam and told him that his woman was doing another guy by the name Paul Omollo. Sam cried the whole night, drunk himself silly as I prepared for Vee.

A week later, Vee showed up. She was elegantly dressed in a blue top-dress that slightly exposed her cleavage, blue high-heels and she carried a blue handbag. She called me when she arrived in town but I told her that I had arrived earlier and was at the restaurant we were to meet.

She came to the door, surveyed the room looking for me. Vee has this almost heavenly gait. Have you ever seen a lady walk till you aren't sure whether she is really walking or that thing has a different name? That's Vee.

When she got to my table I stood and we fell into a long deep embrace. It was not a normal embrace, that one. After pulling her a seat, I held her hand so that she could sit.

We talked a lot, ate and drank. I cracked silly jokes, she laughed. I told lame jokes, she still laughed, using one hand to shield her mouth and the other to shut me down. I knew she wanted more, so I went a step ahead. I slid my hand under the table, on her knee, down her thighs. She stayed still; she shook the other leg as her watery eyes suggested a thing or two.

“It’s getting late, think we should go now,” I whispered.

“Finish your drink first,” she replied.

One gulp, I was done. I laid a five-hundred shilling note on our bill, got off my seat and went to pull her seat so that she would rise. We had spent four hundred shillings, but I didn’t need that balance now.

Minutes later, lips interlocked, breaths became louder and graduated to moans. I unstrapped the red pair of thongs that she had worn and didn’t care where in the house I placed a pack of condoms. I made my way to the maternity room.

Last night Vee gave me twins, I called one Derrick, the other Zerrick.

**By Babji-babjy.wordpress.com**

## Love

She was torn between belief and doubt,  
Pressed between a soft-heart that told her of love,  
And a torn past that whispered betrayal in her ear,  
Her heartbeat was all she could hear,  
And tears welled her eyes and offered only a blurred image of the man,  
The man she had pledged loyalty to,  
The same man on his knee, with a ring,  
Ready to welcome her to his eternity.

Still divided she was,  
Many a time she'd rehearsed her affirmation,  
But now her tongue proved to be alienated,  
She knew no more than herself,  
The man she knew and adored seemed strange now,  
Was it the bow tie?  
No, he had worn one of those during their vacation,  
Was it the cologne?  
No, it was synonymous to his presence now,  
She was lost yet she had the compass in her hand,  
All she had to do was walk down the aisle,  
And walk the rest of her life with him.

She was the liability; she viewed herself as the mistake,  
He had reassured her and she knew beyond doubt that he meant his word,  
He had held her hand through the psychiatric sessions he paid for,  
His shirts knew the taste of her tears and his ears absorbed all her blabber,  
She was stable now, but she feared the worried face she'd clothe him with,  
She wouldn't want to worry him in his years of merry,  
So she contemplated on saying no, out of love,  
A love stronger than the will to say yes.

Yet, her spirit covered all doubt with a will to say yes,  
Her memories pushed her to the wall painted red with the love flowing deep within,  
She was bait in her own fishing game, and she was caught,  
She couldn't bring herself to say no to the very person, who pulled her,  
At times when every other loved one pushed her,  
He was there for her, at times when time and distance played a role of separation,  
He was there for her, when her tears blinded her sight of the light,  
He was there for her, when she thought the end was bitter than her tears,  
He was there with open arms when she ran from herself.  
She was his as he was hers, yet she felt she wasn't enough for him.

Her lips parted, her heart raced and so did adrenaline,  
She was the witness to her own trial,  
She had the choice of relief and security,  
Yet both sides weighed the same, and brought her back to him,  
He deserved better, yet she always said she was the best for him,

Her knees felt inexistent and so she knelt before him,  
Such a sight,  
Two kneeling figures before the big red ball in the horizon,  
One with a proposal, the other with a face painted with warm tears,  
She whispered yes - a freedom in eternal bondage,

**By Sam- [www.rapando.co.ke](http://www.rapando.co.ke)**

## **PETE.**

The scariest thing about love is that it doesn't come with a manual. Or a reference point, one that tells if one is going too fast or too slow, too deep or too close to the surface. A guard whose beeper goes off when it's dropped so we can pick it up. To the contrary love is paradoxical; easy and yet difficult to perceive, clearly defined yet amorphous in reality.

Pete had these thoughts all Saturday morning as he lay in his campus room. He had sporadic memory of the previous night's events, though he knew something momentous had happened. All he remembered was that there was a scuffle at the tuck shop which quickly morphed into a full blown brawl. The pain on his shins and the huge bump on his forehead told the rest of the story which lay somewhere in his subconscious in hazy details.

One thing he knew unequivocally was that the events of the previous day had changed him, he now was a far cry from the man he had been a few hours ago.

What shocked him was the reason why he found himself in this place; love.

He was born Peter Munene Muthama twenty three years ago. His siblings liked to call him *Nesh*. His mother always called him Pete which was short for Peter.

Pete's mum settled on this name after watching the series 'private practice' many times over, months before Pete came into the world. On the cast was this bewilderingly handsome doctor who went by the name Pete. Pete's mum had fallen for the actor's on-screen charm and effortless manner. Thus, when her last bundle of joy came into the world she eased him into the title 'Pete'.

Pete was adored by his family members for various reasons; his parents thought he was an agreeable child. His two elder brothers thought he was nice sport and to his two sisters he was their go-to sibling on all matters boys.

The fact that he was the middle child meant he couldn't take sides in any family fight. Everyone wanted to be in his good books.

Pete had always been intrigued by girls and generally romantic love. In all his teenage years Pete dreamed of the day he would be able to convince a girl to follow him to the ends of the earth.

A few of his friends had girlfriends; as expected he came to learn at their feet. They told him to be a man he had to lie, a little. They also let him know that on some days girls needed a leader to follow, so to best prepare for these days he would need to stamp his authority from the first day he was involved with a girl.

They further schooled him on how to look at girls in dreamy eyes, claiming it to be a ticket to any damsel's heart. On some days the advice worked, on others it failed, still Pete wasn't disheartened.

Pete had been to a Catholic sponsored high school whose head teacher was a *padre* and the rest of the teaching staff a cocktail of men of the cloth; brothers, priests and male lay workers. The school had a ridiculous set of rules on girls, one of the rules forbid the students from talking to girls within the school compound.

The edict was ludicrous seeing as the only girls who came to the school were nuns from the nearby parish. They would either come to collect orders from the Padre or during mass that was mandatory for all students.

School folklore had it that once some boys had been caught trying to kiss a nun and thus the *Padre* decreed that the wrong of talking to a girl within the school compound would be punished with expulsion from school.

Rumor had it that the *Padre* had an affair with one of the nuns and thus did not want her preyed upon by lusty teenage boys. So to mark his territory he put in place the draconian rule.

Now Pete was at the university with all the freedom that came with being young and free. Still he steered clear of love. He thought being in love made one too vulnerable. He often wondered what he would do if he fancied a girl who in turn thought he was too short or too skinny for her liking. He didn't think he was ready to be that vulnerable.

At the start of the second semester of his second year, Pete made new acquaintances by the virtue of chasing a lecturer for a missing grade. He and two other students had missing grades on an accounting unit they sat in their first year. The lecturer had them running through hoops to get to him and eventually to their missing marks.

Seeing as they were fighting for common course Pete joined forces with Tip and Ken.

Pete had never talked to either of them, though they took the same course, he only shared a lecture hall with them.

All Pete knew from the rumor mill was that Tip had a funny Ugandan accent and that she was friends with Ken. In Pete's eyes Ken was living the campus dream because he had throngs of girls parading for his attention. As if that was not enough he had Tip following him everywhere!

Ken was a charmer; he knew to flirt his way out of any tight spot. Ken reminded Pete of Connor Walsh of *'how to get away with murder'*. Ken knew what he wanted and how to get

it; his mantra was the end always justified the means. Ken was rumored to stay at a really exquisite guest house out of campus, he was the dream friend.

The trio's strategy on getting their missing mark was to daily waylay the lecturer as he came from a lecture and then plead with him to get their missing marks. So they took turns at running after the lecturer. Whenever it was Tip's turn, she always went with Ken and vice versa, Pete did not mind going on the chasing alone.

After a few weeks Pete came to know Tip a bit more, (he was okay learning about Ken through innuendo and campus gossip). Tip's dad was a general in the army while her Mum was Ugandan. Tip was a last born in their family of six and she made heavenly groundnut sauce.

On more than one occasion Pete found himself gagging over Tip's Luganda accent. He thought it was lyrical as it was hilarious. In some wicked way he hoped the lecturer would keep stalling the delivery of the missing marks so he would keep listening to Tip rant over the missing grade.

Pete also came into the knowledge that Ken had a deep dark secret that only Tip knew, he cared squat about the secret.

Pete did not know it but slowly he was falling fast and hard for Tip, Tip on the other hand was oblivious she always referred to Pete as the 'other guy with a missing mark'.

Tip made Pete a believer in the God of all creation; the maker of heaven and earth and all that was in it because Tip was a part of it. He believed in a god who would make a being as perfect as Tip.

While the rest of humanity looked at plants and water bodies to believe and gravitate to the force behind their existence he only needed to look at Tip for him to bow his head and whisper 'thank you' to the creator.

Tip had been handed to him by the angel of missing mark. Tip was his good and perfect gift from above.

Love is patient, kind and it always perseveres, protects and hopes above everything all, of which Pete did for with Tip. He waited for the lecturer with her, he hoped with her when the lecturer promised to look into their missing mark issue and he kindly let his listening ear to her when they were frustrated. He was in love the way the Lord said in his word. Tip never waived in her nonchalance towards him.

Tip listened to Christian rock music; while he liked the heathen kind of rock music. Without notice 'green day' and 'Daugherty' changed places with 'Mercy me' and 'King and country'. He loved the gospel rock music.



As much as he allowed Tip change him he was wary that Tip would never like him as he did her. He was certain that they would graduate and go their separate ways and still Tip would refer to him as 'the guy with the missing mark'. Or they would meet after campus in an interview and she would ignore him.

He thus resolved to keep this love hidden behind the closed doors of his heart; if God was benevolent then he would let him have her clone.

He detested how at ease Tip and Ken were; she let him undo her braids, she let Ken teach her all the new dance moves. He marveled at how they made an executed sleepover plans while they refused to invite him.

In Pete's eyes it's like they were enacting a scene from the Garden of Eden before sin came into the world, he couldn't wait for the part where they would screwed up like Eve and Adam. He hated that he let these feelings trouble him, which meant he more than liked Tip.

Until the previous day Pete's love for Tip had been a secret but now the world knew it.

Pete had been out with his friends in a local café' just close to the campus, the weekend was upon them and they set out to enjoy it the best way they knew how. Campus polls were around the corner so they spent the evening debating on the candidate best suited for the posts.

Not long after, Ken walked in with a youngish looking man and they sat in a semi dark corner of the café'. Pete thought of going over to their table and joining them but he decided against it. He instead opted to study them, after a few moments he got bored and rejoined the conversation at his table.

The next time he looked over at Ken's table he found the youngish man leaning over to kiss Ken. He bat his eyelids in disbelieve when he saw Ken inch closer to the man, wrap his hand around the other dude's nape and kiss him back.

In a split second Pete walked to the table and smacked the pair so hard they forgot of the lip-lock. The two men now stood facing Pete baying for blood. Pete's is friends came over and soon a scuffle erupted and suddenly grew into a full blown brawl with Pete receiving the greater of the blows.

Pete was angry at Ken for cheating on Tip. As he pleaded for mercy he let the secret he had guarded so closely, that he would take a bullet for Tip because he loved her.

As he lay on his bed that Saturday morning he was certain that Tip had heard of the story and now hated him more.

If only he had been courageous enough to profess his love to Tip calmly instead of doing it over a fit of rage. Pete hated love at that point in time.

**By Gasheri- [www.gasheri.co.ke](http://www.gasheri.co.ke)**

## Strangers And Friends

She was shy, he could tell. It turned him on the more. He carried her in his arms, kissing her passionately. She was shivering with excitement. She couldn't fight the feelings anymore. He put her to bed kissing her neck hungrily. He was panting and so was she. He bit her ears gently and whispered, "*Are you sure about this, honey?*" "*Yes. Yes.*" She whispered and let nature take its course. Chris was all she wanted.

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There are days that a woman is in no mood for make up or putting any effort to look good. On such days, a woman wakes up moody, angry at the world and wonders why she was born female. The woman will grab the nearest attire and doesn't care if it is creased, oversized or not. That was how Nekesa was feeling on that day.

She went to work stressed. Her relationship with Mathews was hitting rock-bottom. Her appraisal at work was inconsistent. She wanted to quit, stay home in bed and cry her heart out. She felt lonely and deserted. Her life was a labyrinth, a maze, a bottomless pit. She felt empty and lacked the motivation to keep going. Her relationship with Mathews was passionless. It was 8 months now since they had met. He had suggested they break up but she hang in there. She was afraid to be single at 25. She begged him to stay. Life has a funny way of punishing people who want to go against nature's plan that dictates a man to chase and beg a woman. When the opposite happens, Mother Nature unleashes her uncontrollable fury at the victim who wants to change the law of nature. So Mathews treated her like some unwanted dirt on a bright cloth. He pushed her away and sent signals. He ignored her messages and calls. Yet she chose to stay, loving him at 25.

She sat on her computer, staring at it, all images blurry. She checked her phone to see if Mathews had replied to the text he sent at night. He hadn't. Maybe he hadn't seen it. Maybe, his phone was off. She resent it, finishing it with *I love you always, Matt*. He didn't reply. She sat behind her computer, drained emotionally. She was dead inside.

She shot from her desk and rushed out. She couldn't control herself any more. She went to the washroom and cried her heart out. At first, she sobbed softly, then as thoughts flooded her mind; she broke down, crying loudly, unshaken by the surrounding. After an hour, she left the washroom feeling lighter. She took the lift going down stairs. On 4<sup>th</sup> floor, her life changed.

A man talking on phone entered the lift. *"Yes, in a few minutes. Okay. Yes. I sent the report to Yung. He called last night. Yes. No no no. fine. Let me just call you at 1 to confirm,"* he said and hang up. He was bald and had kempt beards. His baritone voice had a timbre and as he spoke, it kept reverberating at the back of my mind. He spoke with composure and peace. Nekesa envied his life. *"Hello. Are you okay? Sorry I was on a call. I couldn't say hi immediately.* He addressed Nekesa, smiling. *"Okay."* She said shrugged. *"You look sad."* He insisted. *"Am fine."* She said and looked away. *"You are not okay. I wish I could help."* He supplied. She tried hard to fight the tears but fresh ones erupted as the stranger watched in bewilderment. He suggested they go to a nearby café, just outside the office blocks. She obliged.

Chris sat adjacent to her. He held her hand and rubbed it. *"It will be fine. Just cry."* his voice was encouraging. Nekesa sobbed painfully as he sat rubbing her back. Eventually, after what seemed like eternity, she remained silent. They sat quiet for long, both lost in

thoughts. Chris was wondering what was eating her up. Had she lost someone? Was she sick? Had she been fired? Why would such a young lady cry so painfully? *"Are you okay now? Wanna talk?"* He asked the mute Nekesa. *"No. Thanks for your kindness. Call me Nekesa,"* She said, forcing a smile. She was a sad woman. She was broken. *"Am Chris. Christopher."* He said. *"You should go now,"* she said rising unexpectedly. He rose. *"Will you be okay?"* *"Yes. I will be fine. Again, thanks Chris. I am just passing through a lot. But I will be fine."* She started walking away. Chris followed. *"Nekesa, maybe you should give me your number, don't you think?"* *"No. there's no need."* She was now pacing and thinking of just running as far as possible. She disappeared between the next blocks and lost Chris.

She could not stop thinking about him. His voice resonated on her mind for days on end. He had brown eyes and a sweet smile that makes one comfortable. His spirit was sweet too. His baritone voice was amazing. His baldness was sexy too. He was fair in complexion and attractive. How could a stranger be so kind? He was a busy man no doubt because even as they sat in the corner of the café, phone calls kept coming but he would hang up. He chose to sit next to her and share in her agony. Whatever agony it was she was going through. His presence alone made her feel better. So, after all, there are some nice men left. She thought in the silence of the lonely night. She kept turning and tossing. On that night, she saw Chris chasing her in the windy green fields, both of them barefoot. She was screaming with excitement. He ran and caught up with her, carrying her around and swirling her around as she screamed. They tumbled down a cliff, and rolled in the nearby pool. She startled from sleep. She wished she had given him her number. She felt lonely again and wished Chris was her friend.

Nekesa came to work looking better for the next few weeks. She chose her dresses consciously. She hoped to see Chris one more time. She wanted to thank him earnestly. He had made her feel better. She did not call Mathews anymore. Why would she hold on to wind?

Many weeks passed. Every time she took the lift and made a stop on 4<sup>th</sup> floor, she hoped Chris would walk in but it never happened. She would walk to the café often and see Chris facing the wall. She would walk towards him, her heart beating. She would touch his shoulder, but when he turned, it wasn't him. It had happened thrice. She had apologized to the strangers with cheekiness. *"Oh! Sorry! I thought you were someone else."* She'd say, feigning remorse.

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Nekesa was on foot, headed to office one Friday morning. She was not in the best of her flattering clothes, but an ordinary skirt and floral chiffon. She wore closed black shoes and her handbag dangled heavily from her elbow. She had straightened her hair and coiffured it in a chignon. Someone tapped her back and she turned startled. Behold stood Chris, with his majestic aura and sweet smile. *"Chris!"* she screamed and threw herself in his huge arms. He hugged her tightly, rubbing her gently. *"Oh Chris... is it you?"* she whispered as she lingered on his quite built chest. *"Yes. It is me, dear. Are you okay?"* the word "dear" came so naturally and she smiled. She disentangled herself, embarrassed about the obvious fondness she had of him. *"Please just don't deny me your number again..."* This time, more than ever, she recited her number quickly before he finished asking. *"I was so worried about you. But you look so amazing today."* He poured out his

heart excitedly. She wanted him to be around her, even if just mere friendship. *"Can I see you after work?"* He asked without thinking twice. Only a fool would refuse.

That is how she found herself in The Latte Hotel down town. Chris was already waiting for her. He wore a white shirt which outlined his muscles. It was not very tight, but quite fitting. His beard was trimmed and looked great. His bald head shone in the dim lighting. He had ordered a few drinks before then meal. *"Do you like macaroni steamed with butter?"* *"No!"* She objected strongly, shocked at the recipe. *"Butter in macaroni?"* He laughed heartily. *"Yes. It is very tantalizing."* *"I hate butter. Macaroni is very light. I will be hungry by midnight."* He laughed the more. He liked her realness. *"Well, what will you have that will last you till morning?"* He smiled, touching her hand. She moved her hands far from him. He laughed again. *"I won't eat you Nekesa. Not just yet."* *"You plan on eating me?"* *"Well, no. Am kidding."* Nekesa frowned. She resorted to *matoke* and grilled chicken with a lot of pepper and so did he. *"Why do you like pepper?"* He was curious. *"I just like the hot taste. I have a feeling you think I drink a lot."* She giggled. *"Actually, yes."* He confessed. *"Do you take alcohol?"* *"No. I don't fancy drinking."* *"So when you go out at night, don't you drink alcohol?"* *"Why would I go out at night instead of sleeping? I love my sleep more than anything."* He laughed and wondered if she was lying. He hoped she wasn't. *"You are such great company."* He said looking at his watch. *"It's a shame I should drop you home."*

On Sunday, he asked her to meet him again and they talked for long. During the week, he met her thrice. She was interested in him. He worked in town and lived in the outskirts of Nairobi, in Syokimau. They kept meeting, sometimes for lunch, sometimes for events and others they just met when he passed near her offices. They were now close, but

Chris, being the sort of man he was, was afraid of rushing her. She was vulnerable. She was pessimistic about love and feared commitments. From their uncountable dates, he had established her fear of love. She was more afraid to get intimate and thought it as disgusting. *"You see Mathews and I were cool, but I think I was not up to his expectations in terms of sex."* She had once told Chris. *"But sex should be communicative. You need to say what works for you and what doesn't."* he offered his advice. *"He was my first and I don't think I want that thing again."* She said coldly. It crushed him that she described sex as *that thing*. He liked her a great deal. She was an amazing woman who had just fallen in wrong hands, in her previous relationship. He wanted to win her trust and her love. He wanted her to see him as her man. Mathews had now faded like cloud blown away by wind. He ceased to exist in her life and when he called, she did not bother to pick.

It was on Friday night, 4 months later, when Chris asked her to meet him in town, briefly. He hugged her unusually long and said he missed her. She was taken aback, *"Chris, today you are serious."* She jabbed him. He laughed as they sipped coffee. *"You know, Nekesa, I sometimes get so afraid that you'll push me away someday."* *"Why would I do that?"* *"I don't know. It's just fear. But I love you so much. I hope you trust me. Will you agree to come to my house today?"* He said urgently. She held her breath, smiled and stood. He was afraid she was leaving, like the first day she did. She hugged him and told him, *"Why did you take long?"*

By Gladwell- [www.chingano.com](http://www.chingano.com)



## **THE CALL.**

When you've been in the city as long as I have you kind of get used to it. You become attached to the polluted air that makes you cough every now and then, the stream of grayish water that flow along the roads, the rowdy Matatus, the stream of unfettered hawkers clogging the side-walk like cholesterol in a vein; and the muddy puddles in the middle of January, an exceptionally hot month, that you have to jump over each time you cross a street.

You get used to that lady neighbor who always wears tight black pants and a spaghetti top that hangs on her fat shoulders. The creases and folds of her tummy that hang precariously when she bends over to clean the veranda her heavy breathing when she's tired or runs out of air and her surprisingly soft pleasant voice when she says hello on your way to your house.

The country with its green carpet of vegetation, clean air, the sound of happy birds singing and flying from one branch to another in a kind of game, the laziness of time and the gentle breeze that seems to last a lifetime, the smell of cow dung or maybe goat that hangs in the air like it has nothing better to do, starry nights that form a dazzling ceiling of sparkling diamonds right above your face: that life has nothing for you.

You don't fancy living there, how could you? The people who live on the countryside are a world apart from the city people. They are in no hurry, peaceful and relaxed. They wear smiles on their faces that seem to rub off years of exhaustion, they say hello to everybody, not like the lady on your floor who only says hi to you and one other guy.

I like the hullabaloo of city life. No. I love it. And I also love Njeri, the lady with black tights and a spaghetti top, she warms up the house; which is not really a house but one room with faded blue walls, a poster of Bob Marley on one side, a bed to one corner a suit case under the bed, a stove next to a wooden table where the television set sits and a clock that stopped working as soon as I bought it. Usually she comes over after work and rubs my shoulders as she asks about my day in her soft mellow voice, a voice that is like laying your head on feathered pillows.

Then she will tell me about her day as she fumbles with a pan setting in on the stove and adding to it cooking oil and onions and the occasional tomatoes before adding greens. Minutes later, a warm meal before us, her arm around my waist and the television blabbering on about mundane politics we will eat in silence then relish in a little bit of love-making; always careful not to wake the neighbors.

Most times she spends the night and leaves in the morning as I prepare for work but only after she prepares my breakfast; a cup of hot water with two sugars and a hanging teabag; also a piece of the previous night's ugali.

Other times she leaves immediately we are done, on such nights she is usually sulky, in her eyes is an unfulfilled promise glaring back at me. Other times it is disappointment, regret, and a tinge of sadness in them. Usually, before she goes I grab at her t-shirt or whatever it was she had on and whisper a meek "I love you" which seems to work and for the brief three seconds it takes to mouth those words a glimmer of hope flashes in her eyes. Eyes that no longer have the white innocence but have been clouded by the misery of living in the city so they are a pale red. In this city white eyes are rare.

"We need to meet them..." she says. Njeri is talking about her parents. She always does. Her eyes, pale red, light up when she does and her voice becomes animated you can see the chords come out dancing and doing little cartwheels.

We've had this conversation so many times before; it started two months after we had started sleeping together on a July, the coldest I think I've ever experienced. The cold felt like it had lost someone close and was acting out; moody and depressed. I had come to the house; late as usual and the clanging of the metal door as the padlock gave in to my key must have woken her up - if at all she was sleeping. In a few minutes she was outside my door softly knocking. Outside she stood in not her black tights but a red wrapper, a white t-shirt, an old brown stocking on her head and a little blue thermos with a white cap in hand.

She thought I'd be cold after a long night and she brought me some coffee. I wasn't expecting it but I had seen the glances she had thrown my way whenever she thought I wasn't looking, or how her soft voice softened whenever she said hi, and even the days I would find my clothes off the line when there had been a down pour only for her to bring them neatly folded in a dry basin and with a smile say "I know you like your clothes dry".

That night over her coffee and the dull music in the background playing on the T.V we talked about a lot. She was profound, she viewed the world through the eyes of a two-year old always in awe, always inquisitive and most importantly always seeing the best in every situation even when bad. It was that night that I learnt a lot about her both emotionally and physically. A gentle and generous lover.

"It's been two months now." Her voice brought me back from the reverie.

"Yes it has. Two very good months."

"But?" she asked, her eyes intently gazed upon my face. Because with me there's always butts, either in a statement or in my bed and sometimes both.

“But it’s not enough, I mean do you think this is the right time to go and meet your parents? What do we tell them?”

“What do you mean what do you tell them? Tell them what you tell me; every night. That you love me. That you want to spend the rest of your life with me. Crack those little jokes you usually make when I’ve had a bad day and make my dad laugh. It’s not hard. And time? Right time? Since when was there a right time?”

In the middle of the conversation her words reminded me of just how deep she is, how to her it is always black and white, hot or cold, right or wrong. It is such moments that reminded me of that our first conversation and how in love I had felt next to her warm pulsating body. How I knew I’d never feel such comfort next to anyone else, not the beer drinking caliber that paraded down the streets at four A.M finding a cab home.

“Fine you win. We’ll do it. Actually let’s do it. Next month? The first weekend while I still have something in the bank.”

With girls (women?) like Njeri, it is the little things and the details.

I kissed her on the forehead and we watched a sitcom, the IT Crowd, she loved them funny and this was as funny as funny got and that night even as we made love, the artificial cued laughter and applause of the audience in the sitcom serenaded us.

In the city time always has somewhere to be rather than sit with you and catch up over a cold beer. It is always in a hurry, always rushing like the hawkers on the street, always on to the next minute before the first is over.

We are the only ones who are never seemingly in any hurry, especially when stuck in traffic, that obnoxious cacophony of still cars lining the black tarmac and polluting the air with diesel stained fumes. The eager faces that peer through the window smiling with stained teeth, dirty faces and oversized tattered clothes begging for a ten shilling. The more daring ones ask for twenty or even fifty shillings. “I have not even had lunch” they will slur along trying to get you to empathize with their despondency. But this city, it hardens you to such pleas and so while you sit there smug pretending not to see their faces, and while they stand there hopeful that you will look at them and feel a pinch of pity; time is moving. Leaving both of you there, unaware and not ready for what’s coming next.

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It did not hit me that this was the last Friday of the month and that back at home Njeri would be waiting for me to come and talk about my plans to visit her parents that weekend. It did not occur to me that as I sat in Mikos (a cozy, quaint bar with adequate lighting illuminating the black plastic tables and yellow chairs) having a cold one with

friends she was in the room packing our stuff, my nice white shirt – the one that had a blue lined collar, and blue jeans and red socks, her short floral dress that hid her tummy and accentuated her curves, her white rubber shoes, the black sandals with a beaded flower, her deodorant – the one that smelt like a fresh cold shower.

So when I walked in a little bit inebriated and hugging her she pushed me to the side of the wall, I hit it and a sharp pain tore through my shoulders. I was not sure why she was angry or why tears were welling up in her eyes.

It's not like I was Moses, the tenant on the third floor. He came home every day drunk, he smelt of other women's bosoms and staggered all the way to fourth floor where he would knock on our door thinking it was his house before Njeri called his wife to come and get him.

In fact I had even come with a pound (maybe two) of flesh, white flesh – chicken –her favorite. I was sure the neighbors had heard it, me hitting the wall, that hard thud of bone against concrete.

“What the hell is wrong with you!” she started.

I could have been fuming, but you know how two beers calms you down? You feel somewhat invincible, which downplays the fact that you could be hurt, and the pain disappears as soon as it appears. I just stared at her and then at the paper bag that was now on the floor, its contents a mystery to the fuming woman in front of me. This fuming flame of a beauty that wanted me to see her parents. What was wrong with her? Was I more drunk than I thought? Was I swaying from left to right as I walked (stood)? Her eyes were passionately lit with the glint of betrayal, why? I have not had any other woman since I met her. What could she be so pissed about? Maybe it was because I did not call her to tell her I would pass by Mikos. But I had a good explanation for that, I had left my phone in the house, next to the bed, on the charger.

She threw the phone in my face, like she knew I had just thought about it.

“They called you. Brian, they called you.” She was shouting.

She never really uses my name, not unless I did something really bad or naughty. In my head I wondered who called me. Who could it have been that made her this angry? I looked down at the phone, a sorry excuse for one, a beat up 1110 with a keypad so worn the letters and numbers had faded. The name across the screen “Mike Plumber” sobered me up. If she had spoken to him (her?) then she would be mad.

Mike was really Carol, a girl who had been a neighbor, living a floor above us. She had recently moved out and knew about our arrangement with Njeri, which she was fine with.

She was the 4 am drunk getting a cab to go home caliber. She did not want anything serious, just a little bit of fun to punctuate the boredom she faced. She must have called to find out if I would be free over the weekend. But I know her, she's smart, she would not say anything to Njeri, so probably Njeri was fishing. Fishing for answers, trying to test my loyalty. A fake name did not help my case but I had to try.

"What did he say?" I asked

"You mean Mike? Oh she had a lot to say Brian."

She knew. She fucking knew!

I kind of knew I would screw it up, with Njeri. I never know how to keep a good thing going when I have one. I wanted to ask her, broach the topic, if we were still on to see her parents. But there's something about when a girl (woman?) takes the suitcase, throws your stuff out, crams hers in and walks out that says "do not ask me about meeting my parents tomorrow".

I could've followed her out, held her by the arm turned her, then by the waist and looked into her eyes and let my eyes talk to them, speak to her soul. I could've let my fast beating heart send a message to hers. I should've been so close to her face that the alcohol in my breath snaked its way into her nose and it made her light-headed. I should've moved my hands from her waist slowly touching her curves, and planted the other hand on her cheeks. I should've finally kissed her in the same breath as an apology. She might not have believed me but her body would've. I should've done all that but Mike, Mike called again and I answered.

"She knows."

Those were the first words out of my mouth.

"Shit. Is she mad?"

"What do you think? What do you really think? Is she mad? Nkt! What kind of silly question is that Muthoni?"

"Okay I take that as a yes..." she starts

"You take that as a yes? Oh really? What gave it away?"

Carol knows I get sarcastic when I am mad but she also knows how to calm me down.

"Do this come over and let's put this anger to good use, turn it into passion. I've been bad and you deserve to spank me!"

I am standing outside of my house where my probably soon to be wife is crying her heart out. I should be remorseful. I should at least try and make things work by talking it out. But here comes Carol with just the right words. If you see her lips, those soft supple pink mounds of flesh, and hear her voice, that caramel coated tone from heaven, you would know that she could make you things by only using words.

Caroline is beautiful. She's petite and has long legs that curve a little bit outwards when they approach her thighs where they slightly widen and give her an allure of a fully endowed woman. Her steps are light and her foot arches ever so slightly when they touch the ground where her slender feet leave little or no impression of ever being there. She has wide eyes, wide brown eyes that stare deep down into you; stripping you of all your bravado, stripping you naked such that your bare soul lies before her, in those eyes as she takes you in. It is a beautiful thing, really it is, but it is also scary. There is something about a woman that can see through you.

"Okay. I am on my way." I reply.

Over the phone I can hear her smile. A sly smile. Like she thinks she has won a battle. Maybe she has.

What about Njeri? I think to myself. She deserves better than this. But will I stay out in the cold to show her how much I love her? Do I even love her or just the idea of her? I stand outside hanging onto the railing and watching the lights flicker imagining the conversations going on in houses around me. Maybe they are warm and interesting over supper. Maybe they are cold and distant. Or maybe they are heated arguments much like mine. I think of Carol. The beautiful slender brown girl with wide brown eyes that seems to love me as much as I love myself. A girl that knew her place in the food chain, second in the pecking order, but a girl who stayed nonetheless. Maybe it was her I was supposed to be with. After all she did not have these notions of meeting her parents. She was not like Njeri she let me be and gave me space even when I did not need it and is not that what a man wants space?

The thing with thoughts is when they start they become like a long treacherous train ride. One with non -stops. You have to go through all of them. So when I started thinking about how the two know each other. How Carol is Njeri's best friend some sort of lump got stuck in my throat. These are the things that get men killed. And Njeri has the temper, she's calm yes, but when provoked she does first then thinks later. What would she do if she ever found out? How would I break it down to her?

There's the clanking of the metal latch behind me. I turn to see Njeri standing in the doorway her phone in her hand with the screen facing me. I can see clearly the name written on the message, it's Carol BFF. The message itself read "Thanks for Brian. He's mine now]" I did not have time to react or think. She came charging and hurled me over the railing.

And now... I have become accustomed to this darkness. It's cool but not cold.

**By Shadrack: -[www.shadtherackster.wordpress.com](http://www.shadtherackster.wordpress.com)**

**End\*\*\*\***