

2018 K A L E M B A
short story prize
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Brief Encounters

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[unedited script]

The scissors cut through the knotted sisal ropes holding the vast mass of cloth together, and there it was a revelation that everyone could have a piece of.

Amai Changa's smile told the whole story she had hit the jackpot. "Wow, you have a good product," her neighbors from both sides said. it was not without envy because competition just got stiffer. She was happy with her new acquisition of second-hand women's underwear; her long trip from Lusaka was about to bring her good returns. Her arrival should have been earlier had it not been for the bus breaking down.

Like the say "sometimes-bad happenings turn out to be a blessing". Opening of her consignment was perfect, forty minutes to five PM rush hour; her positioning was strategic, right close to the women selling tomatoes and fresh vegetables. The sooner she could sell half of her consignment the sooner she could pay her son's first semester university fees.

Eyes of admiration from her competitors were firmly cast on her stand; Amai Changa sorted it out racing against time. Known for her loud persona, she was a favorite amongst the callboys.

There was a motherly embodiment about her. Like most of the vendors on President Avenue road in Ndola, she was the breadwinner in her family.

After privatization her husband had lost his job, the once middle-class family now had to adapt.

She had taken it under her stride to ensure she holds the family together. While her husband continued lamenting about the good old days of employment. Eighteen years on she had educated her children selling second hand clothes. Her business had evolved according to seasons, from selling second hand ladies clothes, to selling kids clothes, she had been consistent with Salaula (Second hand clothes) unlike her other friends who kept switching from one commodity to the other.

She had to get word out of her new arrivals; she raised her voice " Amplifier"! And like a hero had called to rescue the day, Amplifier heeded the call and was there in a flash. Amai Changa gave him the advertising concept he took a sip of Junta (Local made Whiskey) and was onto the real business.

"Ama knickers (ladies pants), aya red, black, white, any color, one size fits all, five-kwacha che (only)!" His voice was audible this was high definition sound at its best. Amai Changa though was not all too pleased.

"Iwe Amplifier osati ku kamba ati ma knickers (don't use the word ladies pants) improvise".

Amplifier had a new edited version running in seconds" utwa mukati (inside wear) every color and every size, five-kwacha che", the smile on Amai Changa gave it a thumbs up.

Twenty minutes into rush hour and Amai Changa's section was a hive of activity, not even the showering rain could stop customers stopping over. Manicured nails, not manicured nails, the yellow fever hands, well-faired hands, all drawing lingerie of different colors and inspecting carefully. The Manicured hand dug deep into the pool of opportunity and held onto the red lingerie. As it tried to pull it, there was another force pulling it away, their eyes finally met, and like two characters about to wrestle both ladies knew this was war.

Namakau, 35, was tall and had a good dark shade of skin. She was clad in a black and white dotted jacket, with white pants, and black Nine West heels, her head was dawned with refined Brazilian hair. Namakau an accounts assistant at one the cities leading firms was the epitome of the new age Zambian woman, for now though her eyes were focused on her newfound competition.

Millie, 22, her face was light, while her hands could not match up her facial shade. She had applied way more than enough make up, which in no time would become a pot of mud if those showers kept falling on her. She was clad in Gucci colored top, for the record it read "Gucci".

Her blue jeans accentuated every curve on her body; her shoes matched her top brand and color "Gucci". She was unfazed, and she was ready for this one. She was very familiar with the city streets having been working for over a year now at the Lebanese store selling hair extensions and body

and facial creams.

"Excuse me, I got it first".

Namakau tries to sound as diplomatic as she can. Millie gives her a top-down stare, shaking her head in disagreement she was not going to let the linguistics play an upper hand. She pulled the piece of lingerie closer to her.

"Let go, I got it first", before Namakau could answer, Millie had another line for her.

"You those we call "some of us", please just let go". Namakau was not going to let anyone use that social line on her, she had heard it all too often used on her and her peers.

"Please, you don't have to cause a scene, just let go, I have witnesses who can say I got it first".

Millie could not believe what Namakau was trying to play at.

"This is corruption" she exclaimed, "Do you think you are better than me? I also have witnesses".

The focus had shifted to the ladies; Namakau at this point was not thinking of the possibility of bumping into anyone from her circles, she was focused on the matter at hand. This was not just any kind of lingerie.

"Do you even know the value of this lingerie"? "Yes, it's lingerie, and I want it".

" I thought as much, you have no idea of the value, this is not just any lingerie, this is Victoria's Secrets" Namakau said in a tone like a lecturer schooling a fresher. Millie unfazed by the names thrown at her.

" Hey, look here I don't know anything about Victoria and her secrets, I just want the lingerie, stop trying to involve people who are not here, we know you ".

An irritated Namakau tried to push her agenda further.

" Am not saying this belongs to Victoria and am saying that's the brand".

The lecture was not helping; Millie was not having any of this. Amai Changa at this point tried to calm the situation.

"Ladies, please there's enough red lingerie to choose from". Namakau looking towards Millie

"You heard the woman"

"You also heard her, do you think you are better than me to deserve this one"?

"No, I just feel I got to it first, so I should buy it,"

"And why is it so important that you should have it and I should not?"

Namakau sized up herself like in her hay days of been part of the debate class set out her pointers.

"Firstly, I believe I am the one who got it first, secondly, I value this more than you do, to you this is just lingerie. This is Victoria's Secrets, I understand the value of this brand, and do you know that big stars wear Victoria's Secrets"? . These pointers did not make Millie flinch.

"Big stars like who"?

"I am talking Beyoncé, Victoria Beckham, and Nicki Minaj".

"So, you think one of them wore this and sent it to Africa"?

The crowd burst into laughter, bringing Namakau to the realization that this was now a spectacle.

Namakau despite the setback keeps her calm and continues with the literacy lesson on the value of the lingerie.

"It's a possibility, but that's not why I want it. I want it because it is a hard product to find here in Ndola, and honestly.... what's your name"?

" Millie"

" Millie, I am Namakau. Honestly Millie, this is a good deal for me. I can't afford to shop for a new one on eBay and have it shipped here. In truth I want to wear it for my first-year wedding anniversary, it's something really special".

The tension dies down, calm reigns, a thread of honesty has finally been sown. Millie pauses for a few seconds

" Okay Namakau you can have it".

Namakau face is graced with a smile; her prayer had finally been answered. Millie finally gives in, it was like battle of the wits and Namakau

was feeling victorious but tried look humble in

victory. The crowd was deflated, and it finally showed whom the favored in this battle. Millie was their hope of having one over the “wannabe “class. However, with both women still holding onto the lingerie, hope was not dead.

" You can have it on one condition",

Namakau didn't see this one coming; Millie had one last card play.

"And what's that condition"?

"You pay me fifty-kwacha, since it means so much to you and you have stated it is more expensive for you to buy online and have it shipped".

"Are you trying to exploit my honesty"?

"No, you are the one trying to exploit me" Millie responds confidently.

Namakau in disbelief looks for a way out from Amai Changa, but she knows all too well not take anyone's side. She tells the ladies to come to an amicable end. It's getting dark, but the crowd won't leave the great lingerie Indaba. This will make for a fresh story in most homes and in the late-night mini buses; thankfully for Namakau no one is recording this on their mobile phone.

She's too engrossed to even care, she is focused on one thing, get the lingerie and who knows maybe post a photo or two in her whatSapp group. She knows all the girls will want to know how she got her new acquisition and her script will go something like " Saw it in a magazine, ordered it online, and going to surprise hubby on our anniversary". She wasn't of course going to tell them about Millie and Amai Changa that's for sure.

Namakau racing against time decides to give into Millie's deal removing a fifty kwacha much to Millie's delight. Millie smiles and let's go of the lingerie, finally Namakau has it in her possession.

Millie tucking the money in her back pocket walks away.

" Thank you, watching her disappear into the crowd, Namakau turns and looks at Amai Changa who cheerfully holds out her hand to receive payment for this prized possession.

" Young ladies, you are a problem with your labels, I didn't know these

things mattered"

"The matter to 'SOME OF US'".

Both ladies burst out in laughter.

"Millie is just stubborn" Amai Changa adds.

"Yes, she is, but she is clever, and in truth I think she got to it first, but once I saw the label I had to fight for it".

"You are both good women" Amai Changa smiles as she hands Namakau the change.

"We have inconvenienced you enough today, please keep the change".

Walking towards her car buying some tomatoes along the way, she feels victorious. Namakau couldn't wait to get home and wash her new acquisition in preparation for the next day. She was armed with the necessary detergents, disinfectants and softeners. She would give two washes or three, and of course after that, take the best shot to share on her girl-friends WhatSapp group. Anxiously she drops everything on the kitchen floor holding only onto the black plastic bag, she quickly rushes to the bathroom, ensuring the door behind her is closed, she was treating this secrecy with a level five status.

Religiously inspecting the lingerie for any wear and tear, it's perfect and could qualify for a rating of A, and there it read " VICTORIA'S SECRET", much to her relief. A second reading revealed it all there was no " I" after all. "So that was Chinese second hand clothing, damn you China," she whispered to herself with a sense of dejection. She remembered the smile on Millie's face pocketing they cash. Truth is told they are no details in " Brief Encounters".