

2020 KALEMBA

short story prize

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Daze

Mukuka Nkunde

There he was, the love of her life, the man who made her believe he could move mountains, that at her breath the world could be stalled, he made her believe, he told her that she could take flight and reach for the stars, the man who once believed in her, the one who anchored her spirit. There he was at the end of a barrel, the barrel of a gun she was aiming at him. The number of times she had aimed it at the shooting range, aimed it at the makeshift melon head and watched it splatter when she squeezed the trigger. She had told herself several times it was for stress relief, to free up all the pent up anger, all the foul energy she had inside her. But now she knew it had been practice for this moment, the moment she would lodge a bullet in his head and put an end to all of it. For the first time in years there was silence, there he was on his knees with a busted lip, bleeding onto the floor, looking back at her, not with fear but more with defiance. Edging her on to do it, his eyes seemed to say. The clock chimed hauntingly as if counting down to his damnation. She was certain she was going to kill him, put an end to the misery he had brought her.

It's the violence in his soul that caused him to want her kill them both. Some may not have believed him, but he loved her, he swore upon the stars he loved her. From the very first moment he'd met her, she had always been the one. He knew she was strong and had taken pleasure in dominating her. It made him feel strong, feel more of a man. When he failed, she became his punching bag. And each time she took it which she did every time he did, it made him feel a little less human, a little more monster. And for some reason the violence in him just grew from strength to strength. This wasn't her fault, she had absolutely nothing to do with it. She was just on the receiving end of how the world had raped his spirit, torn his mind. A father who had instilled in him, that a man should never cry, to feel was a woman's job and to work was a man's. And so looking at the gun in his face, the barrel so close he could kiss it, he recognised those eyes, and how they were when they were younger. Certain and sure

with intent, he hadn't seen her this certain in years. She was going to kill him, and he hoped she would.

When she woke that morning she was sure of one thing, she needed to leave. It was time to get out. When it was just her it had never mattered, she saw her death and had breakfast with it every morning. She constantly waited for the final blow and always hoped that would be soon, so she could rest in peace. But her second chance came in the worst packaging ever, the product of rape on one of his drunken nights. That night had humiliated her, made her feel so cheap. He took her in the kitchen while his friends laughed in the living room. She had begged and pleaded, yelled and screamed but he refused to listen. Within minutes he was done, leaving her with a black eye and a battered soul. And when she reported it to the elders, she was ridiculed for refusing to do her duty as a woman, and she got what she deserved they said. His relatives threatened to get him a more submissive wife, her relatives were furious for they said she was embarrassing them. But here he was, her beautiful bundle of hope and new life, her clean slate who came to her through the ugliest of occurrences. Her son had finally given her the courage to leave his father, if she couldn't do it for herself, she could do it for him, because she couldn't imagine raising a child in this façade.

He had been gone for weeks, to one of his mistresses or other and wasn't expecting him back for a couple more days that was his routine. He put very little effort in lying or covering his tracks these days. If anything he would tell her the truth and walk off. She would be lying if she said it caused her no pain, it did, she loved the man, no matter how hard she tried she loved him, Jesse Ntambo was her world, the best parts of him anyway, that is why she decided to name her son after him, even when he showed no interest in the boy, if anything she was sure he loathed him. But she called him Jesse to remind her of the best moments, when times were good, for that was all she could carry with her. Everything else she was leaving behind. She was going to skip town, no family meetings this time, no one talking her into staying and praying through it, she would leave him, fall off the face of the earth with no trace. She would start a whole new life with Junior. Nothing would stop her, she was ready and had planned it for

months. She had put it off for months but now she was ready. She had passed through the shooting range to collect her gear, collected her gun she had called Nancy. It was an old gun but it had a kick and she loved it, it gave her power, control she could only dream of. She said her normal goodbyes as if she would return, but knowing full well she wouldn't. Tossing the bag into the car, she drove off, saying to herself she would take the gun apart when she got home.

She was apprehensive but excited, she felt exhilarated driving home. If she could pull it off, it would mean everything, the clean slate she needed. A chance to get over him and make sense of her life, give junior the life he needed. She opened the gate and drove in and all of a sudden it was like she was working with time, it was a ticking time bomb. She ran in and found Mwansa the nanny, "where is my son?" she asked, "He's sleeping in his room," she replied. She asked Mwansa to leave, and without making much of it, Mwansa left glad to have a day off. From that moment on it was a marathon, she was stuffed juniors clothes into a duffle bag not caring for her own, ran in the kitchen pulled open all the cabinets and grabbed his bottles and milk. Before she knew it the first bag was full, she ran to the car threw in the first bag and decided to use her duffle bag instead carrying it back into the house. She sat on the couch and started unloading it, she took the gun out, looking at it for a minute. Just as she was setting it down beside her, she heard the gate opening. This couldn't be happening, just her luck she thought, and it had all seemed too easy. Looking through the window, there he was the devil himself. War was about to ensue.

When he drove in the first thing Jesse saw was her car, doors wide open. His heart settled a little knowing she was there. It was always at the back of his mind, wondering when she would run. He drove in right next to her car, and as sure as hell fire she had been packing the car. She was going to desert him, without his knowledge. Fear more than anything gripped his soul. He couldn't lose her, he needed her to feel like a man, and every time she folded it fed his soul. Violence ripped through his spirit, this woman Mwamba Ntalashi Ntambo a woman he owned had the nerve to pack up and leave. There it was, the reason to break her spirit and validate his own. It was easier to hurt

her when she gave him a reason he convinced himself. "Never let a woman go astray, you must discipline her when she runs wild," his Uncles always told him. One of the first lessons he was given going into his marriage.

He walked in like thunder, and she froze, adrenaline had never worked in her favour. It was never fight or flight for her. It was always freeze and he knew it, he always laughed at how it would be the end of her one day. He had caught her in her little operation and all she did was stand there and look at him, eyes blank and detached. It was like she had stepped out of her body. This is how it always started, her frozen, barely saying anything, him screaming at her, and her non-reaction forcing him to hit her and if he was in the mood, taking her on the very spot she fell.

"Where are we going?" he asked, mocking her. "You forgot to send me an invite wife." He did a little waltz around her, taunting her and nothing, she just said nothing. "You little dog, don't you hear me when I speak?" he yelled asking her. He raised his hand and swung it across her face and she fell back into the chair. No way would she leave him, she was his to keep.

Mwamba was not certain what possessed her but when she got up, she was different, it was exactly how people described an out of body experience. She reached for the flat screen TV and swung it at him. It was like watching a mad woman fight, she knew he barely saw it coming. She didn't see it coming either, she couldn't remember for the life of her the last time she had any fight in her. She was never a fighter anyway, she was a big believer in dialogue, but her husband didn't respect dialogue. He wasn't much of a talker. In this moment she decided to use his language, it seemed her being had taken the last beating it could take without retaliating. This was not how she was taught. Her marriage lessons had strictly told her, when your husband disciplines you, you must love him more, thank him for showing you the right way. You must constantly remember that he hits you because he cares, he loves you and wants the best for you. If he does not hit you then he has no love for you.

These marriage rules and regulations were a thing she and Jesse would make fun of. They would laugh at how ridiculous they were. They had agreed they would make their own rules and develop a relationship they could both enjoy. Yes he loved control, but wasn't that what men did and she thought it was cute, she found the toughness sexy. He suffered insecurities and she thought these were things men kind of went through, especially if the woman they were with was a little independent and had a little money of her own. He would wait for her at work, after five and he would drive behind her until she got home, and she always just thought he cared, protected her from the ugliness in this world. He didn't have the best relationship with his father, because the man considered him weak and soft like his mother. Jesse pretended that it didn't matter but Mwamba knew it did, and she had convinced herself that she could help him through it. She did stuff to make him feel more wanted, if anything her love could fix him she thought. She was certain. When they had been dating he had never raised his hand against her. He had pinned her to a wall once and that had been it. There was never any violence against her, but she could recall several times he would get arrested for assaulting a friend, and all she would say was he was just hot tempered.

When he asked her to marry him, it was a bitter sweet moment. He had just made it through a court case that had nearly got him fired. He had pulled a deal on a government contract to make him some quick money. He always believed more money could make him happier and more respected, ultimately proving his father wrong. Mwamba had never quite understood the need for all this money, but Jesse liked taking risks and she respected that. The court case had taken a toll on Mwamba and she had seriously started re-evaluating her relationship with him. And perhaps he saw that and just outside the court, just in the nick of time, after the slim chance of freedom he proposed, asking her to spend the rest of her life with him. And without a second thought, she said yes. They could make all of it work. She could be his sunshine and was going to be his rain. All the concerns and red flags seemed to fade into oblivion when the moment came. All she knew was that she was going to marry her best friend. And here she was, about to kill him.

She was not sure when the bliss became a nightmare, all she remembered is waking up one morning and he hadn't returned home. And when he did and she asked him where he had been, all he said to her was that he would send her back to her mother's house because she was ill mannered, how dare she question him of his whereabouts in his house. She remembered that first marriage lesson because it was the first one they had laughed about. That was when everything changed, when he dared to utter those words to her. As his family ridiculed him for not having children, he also ridiculed her for being barren. She had tried everything and that baby just wasn't coming. The sex became less fun and more of a chore, and before long it was statutory rape. In a space of four years her husband had fathered three children outside their marriage with three different women, and it humiliated her. He had told all his friends of how he could get any woman he wanted and keep the one at home. She was his jester and she knew it. The women would call her to laugh, and taunt her into leaving and every time this happened it would kill her just a little more inside. This is how the journey of insanity started, remembering that moment and drawing on it now, for the first time being able to stand up to him frightened her. He was on the floor, a broken TV next to him, blood gushing from the fresh cut in his head.

Jesse lay there for a minute, less in pain and more in awe. He had finally broken her resolve. She was a tough woman, but she hardly ever raised her hand or voice at anyone or anything. He was never sure how it worked out in his head, but the quieter she got, the more violent he got. He always just figured that her silence challenged the monster he was. It made him feel worse off than he already did. So every time he hit her, he would do it harder just to get a reaction out of her and every time got nothing. Every time he would insult her, his words got uglier and she would never say a word back. She would adhere to tradition and let him get away with just about anything. He remembered the moment he brought another woman into his marital bed while she was in the house. All she did was stand there and look at him, and nearly in tears she whisper good night. He had finally broken her silence, he could justify his hitting her. A lot of people perceived her silence as weakness, but he knew better, he knew in its own way it was defiance, and it drove him crazy.

She knew he loved a good fight and she just refused to give it to him. But not on this day, he had finally broken her resolve.

Moving quickly Jesse knocked her off her feet with one of his legs, and she went head first into the glass table, breaking it into pieces. Getting up he started to drag her by her feet through the glass as it cut into her. She kicked and screamed holding onto the chair and as he dragged her. As she dragged the chair along, something fell onto her face that he couldn't recognise, as he just kept pulling, yanking and kicking her. She reached for it and in a split second she aimed and shot. When Jesse heard the shot he was when he first realized it was a gun. The only reason she had missed his head was because he had been moving her with so much power. The sound had rendered him shell shocked the second shot brought him back to reality and sent him diving behind the chair that was beside him. He could see her getting up off her back through the wall mirror. She shot up the living room, yelling obscenities he had never heard her utter before. She was angry and it was beautiful to watch. She was finally a mad woman coming into her full form. She had put a hole in everything she could see but him, the wedding pictures, the couch the TV stand, and when she ran out of ammunition she reached into the duffle bag on the floor and reloaded. She locked eyes with him in the mirror and shot at it, yelling at him to get up. This was how he always wanted to go, by her hand. Perhaps she could be vindicated for the violence he'd shown her. Standing up, he faced her, looking her straight in the eye. He could hardly recognise those eyes, cold and hard and immediately he knew was his fate. She hit him across the face with the end of her gun cutting his lip open, and he fell to his knees. She pointed the gun to his head, and he looked at her defiantly. Yes, she was going to kill him.

She replayed the events of the day in her head and this particular scenario had never occurred to her, she had never though herself contemplating his death. She had imagined avoiding family phone calls and meetings, the worst she expected was a stern conversation with her mother. This did not occur to her at all. But here she was contemplating her husband's death, toying with the trigger. She didn't believe she had much of an option. If she didn't kill him, in this moment he would kill her. Letting her walk did not seem like an

option to him. The silence urged her on, convincing her of her only course of action. And at light speed she made her decision, precise and sure, kill him, her mind told her. She took a few steps back and aimed, ready in form and spirit, just as she had always practiced. She had never been surer of anything in her life than in this moment. This was her chance, a way out and chance to start anew, room to get over the old, make peace with it and move on. He looked her dead in the eye and looked destitute and broken, almost begging her to put him out of his misery. All she saw was a man, torn and tired. The world had had its way with him, a little boy in aggressive pain, trying to live out a grown man's existence. This man's demeanour had nothing to do with her she realized in that moment. He was not a hard man, he was broken, short changed by life and emotionally stunted and in spite of all of this she still had to kill him. It was a matter of survival than it was of conscience. She raised the gun and confidently aimed and just as she was about to pull the trigger, she heard the wailing of her salvation. Junior screamed his lungs out waking from his nap, her son could sleep through anything, war included and he had proven that today. And that was what recalled her back to sanity, in that moment her reasoning engaged, she couldn't kill the man. How could she ever face her son if she did? And so she said to him, "I will pick my son, and I will leave here with him. What you choose to do after is up to you but I am telling you now, I am done."

Jesse heard those words with disdain. His heart fell into little pieces and he sank further into the floor, raising his knees to him and resting his head in his hands. This is not how it should have ended, she should have shot him and he could have rested in peace. Her taking her revenge would have been his vindication. But here she was walking away, gun in hand, more elated than defeated. How could the wailing of a child, draw her back into her own? If he recalled correctly only he could move her that way. But not in this moment, in this moment he had lost. She had picked his son over him. Just what his mother had failed to do for him. For the woman had walked away leaving him behind to be raised by an even more disturbed man. He had never felt more alone than in that moment, when she walked back into the room she held her son close, gun still in hand behind the toddlers back, cradling him and his toys in the other, it looked so natural like it had

always been that way. The boy whimpered and his mother showered him with kisses, as if kissing away the pain. He remembered when she would do that to him, and for a while it worked like magic. The baby looked at Jesse and uttered the words including dada. And his mother stood there for a moment looking back at him and walked off. She stopped by the shot up couch and dropped the gun, without looking back she walked to the car with purpose and determination, he wanted to run after her but could not, the fight had left him. In that moment he realized one thing, she would never love anything more than she loved the boy, the boy he gave her, and with him came courage, fire and spirit, at least he could go believing he had given her that, even if she had taken it by force. Giving her the things he had initially stolen. She needed him no more and by not killing him she had proven that, that he was just a bad chapter in an otherwise beautiful life. And as for him he had nothing, no one to dominate, no one to love him, better yet no one to hate him as she did. For she had done both beautifully. He turned his head and looked at the gun longingly.

More than anything she was terrified, her son in hand as she walked to her car half expecting Jesse to run her down. But she was ready, she would always be ready. She would have to die first before harm came to junior. Her stride became more confident as she walked. And in that moment she heard the gun go off. One shot, sure and powerful, and after that, silence. She never walked back she went to the back seat strapped Junior in his car sit as he chewed on his pacifier. She closed the doors, never to look back again. She got into the driver's seat and backed up through the drive way, the gate slid open and she went through it and closed it, as junior giggled in his bliss. Never looking back. The next time she saw her husband was in his grave, days later.

