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Ndaba **SIBANDA**

Wifely waters run deep

SekaBuhle has made up his mind and this is what he is imagining: I'll tell her in the face that there is only one bull which is supposed to bellow in that house. Me! That's it! Full stop! Period! It has to stop, this business of whimpering: SekaBuhle, where have you been? Can't you see it's midnight? You're as drunk as a makorokoza (an illegal gold digger) who has struck gold! Why do you behave in an unsuitable fashion like an illegal gold panner? That's unacceptable. Appalling. I mean, your behavior leaves a lot to be desired. Behave in a dignified way please! You're an accountant for God's sake! I hate arguments and shouts. I'm not a fan of monitoring and controlling adults. Adults should behave responsibly. But if adults fail to grow up or to outgrow foolish things, then there's a serious problem. It's even worse when someone's in denial! This makes me really sick. Baby-sitting an adult can never be fun!

I tried tell her that her daily preaching and accusations were not fun to me either. She shook me down to Mother Earth by commanding me to *shut up*. She said: please adhere to

basic maxims of conversations like turn-taking. Now I am talking, do yourself a favor, listen. We can sing together at the same time, but we can't talk together at the same time. Be quiet for a while, is that too much to ask really? Don't say what you know or believe to be false. It's shameful! Do you have tangible evidence to support some of your lame excuses for coming home late? Be brief and relevant. And let your contribution to a discussion be informative. The beauty of a wife-husband interaction or any other form of communication is in the observance and submission to the cooperative principle. Communication is a two-way exchange of words."

I was pissed off. I could have swallowed a live chameleon there and then had it appeared. Where in the world have you heard this? In my culture this wildness is taboo. Not even a husband who has had overdoses of zwanamina ("taste me" or man-stupefying concoctions) would accept that arrogant behavior. No! His relatives would disown him on the spot! Not only that. They would dismiss him as dead! I, right in my mind, her one and only husband, supposedly-being sheepishly ordered to shut up while she talks, and talks nonsense for that matter! If communication is a two-way process, why is she the only one who wants to dominate? It's like she is that all-knowing old-fashioned teacher who seeks to stand on a high platform in class to dish out her conveyor belt of incontestable knowledge, wisdom and instructions to the dull, obstinate and ignorant students. I see all the urge toward domination. I see all her contradictions. She had better castrate me first before I could become her acquiescent zombie.

How dare her! The one I paid handsome lobola (the bride price) for. Does she have a short memory or what? I will remind her that in a short and sharp manner that I can demand the return of all those ten fat cattle from babazala (father-in law). Please, she should not push her luck too far. A bombshell can implode in her hands. Yes, I can. After all, she has born me one child. Just one and imagine, Buhle is seven years now.

My wife has a disturbing habit. All she does is swallow. She keeps on swallowing up those maggot-like things from the clinic. And when I tell her: Thola, I want another child. Can't you see that Buhle is lonely and old? She has the nerve to tell me: Give me a break, Muzi, I'm on the pill. Please wake up from your Stone Age dream. I'm not a fan of beer-hall talk at all. Get this now. Let it sink into your head. I'm no childbearing machine for God's sake! Buhle has many companions in the neighborhood. She has good playmates. Worry, instead about your hopeless drinking sprees and chronic late -coming. Don't worry about my daughter! Don't call her a granny either! Maybe your girlfriends are!

Girlfriends. Really? Is this not the same person who harps on the sacred obedience to relevancy in any given discussion? The other day I decided to put a stop to her wildness. I threatened Thola with a rough slap and before I could even lift my hand she was behaving the cry-baby way." I'll sue you for your abusive behavior". Her left index finger was pointing at my eyes threateningly. I was dismayed and disappointed when she quickly outlined them. What an array of them too. Let us count: Verbal Abuse. Sexual Abuse. Emotional Abuse. Economic Abuse. Use of Technology. Psychological Abuse.

She continued" I'll tell my parents that you're an abusive coward. Go ahead and hit me, my lawyers or the police will give you what you deserve. Not to mention the numerous women`s organizations. Have you heard of the women`s slogan: Wathinta umfazi wathinta imbokodo?(You touch a woman, you touch a boulder). Don't dare press the wrong button. Abusers don't deserve to be in relationships, but belong to jails. You said what? You will slap me? Go on, do it. Try it and you'll rue the moment you slapped me! And the moment you were born. The law will give you a black eye in the twinkling of an eye". She did not even excuse the pun, Good Heavens!

Mthwakaz`omuhle!(Good people!)That day she sobbed histrionically. I saw with my naked eyes a tornado of tears roll down her cheeks like I would drown in them. I did not touch her. No one can be sure! I was afraid partly because I was ignorant of a number of sections of the law on marriage, and partly because of the many newspaper stories of men who were either slapped with hefty fines or sent to long terms in prison for committing one domestic crime or another. It was real. Both male and female magistrates were merciless toward male offenders, so I concluded.

I decided to avoid possible controversies and confrontations by coming home early and spoiling her with a surprise gift or two. In spite of the stressful state of the economy we saw it fit for us to even cruise all the way to the Hwange National Park which is one of the ten largest wildlife heavens of Africa and the largest game reserve in the country. We were truly and absolutely thrilled by the sun-kissed grass that stretches for miles and miles and the awesome sight and number of the elephants at the waterhole. "Wow! No wonder this place is home to one of the world's largest populations of elephants!"she exclaimed, her happy hands touring "the Hwange" of my neck. Seeing the species of bird put us under a magic spell. Catching sight of Africa's majestic wildlife in the form of lions, giraffes, leopards, cheetahs, hyenas and wild dogs was pure delight. To cap a day of mystery and enchantment was the sight and the color of the sunset. It attracted and held our attention as if we were seeing the sun for the first time. It reminded us that we were on the blessed and naturally rich continent of Africa. Mother Africa. There is always something unique and magnetic about the African sun.

The following day we happily weaved our way to an impregnable marriage of grandeur and perfect beauty...in the name and form of the Victoria Falls!! For the umpteenth time, I fell in love with the Falls, and fell deeply and helplessly with my wife. " Mosi-oa-Tunya! What a spectacular waterfall. Awe-inspiring sight. No wonder it's called The Smoke That Thunders", she crooned with an excitement of its own life. "No wonder it's one of the World's Seven Wonders! It's mystical. It's special. And I love you! I love you!" I chorused as I caressed her. She looked at me as if she would momentarily remind me of her gospel of relevancy before sensually whispering."Thank you. I love you too".

The beauty of love was in the air, in the driving seat again. I felt its beat thundering, burning and melting into my heart with a startling ferocity. It drew my heart to her heart and gave birth to a new fusion. In my dreams and thoughts, it murmured those rhythms of everlasting togetherness whose fire is fearless. I perched on its wings and wheels when I was far from her, and her nearness sang in full swing, in praise of a warmth that conquers the vagaries of her weather, her seasons and reasons. In her absence, I was haunted by a certain addictive hunger. I desired to be completed and healed by her closeness. There was an emptiness I could not bear or escape from. In my heart I banished the cyclicity with which our heated arguments occurred. Such contentions and shouts were consigned to the dustbin of past times. I was convinced that the road ahead had no blind turns or sharp humps.

When the way a man lives experiences changes, his friends are quick to pinpoint or pick it up, for good or bad reasons. A friend bumped into me one Friday afternoon at the nearest shop, and subjected me to what I termed silly grilling.

"Why do you scarce yourself, SekaBuhle? Is everything fine?"

"I was on vacation for two weeks. I'm doing fine, thanks".

"What were you up to?"

"NakaBuhle and I visited the Hwange National Park and the mighty Victoria Falls?"

"Wow! The Falls! Do you know that it's largest waterfall in the world?"

"Of course. No wonder David Livingstone wrote: *scenes so lovely must have been gazed upon by angels in their flight.*"

"But talking of Livingstone, don't you think you left out something about his claims?"

For a temping moment, I looked at him without saying a word. Did he think I was a historian?

"Of course like Christopher Columbus, he claimed he discovered that breathtaking waterfall yet the Tonga and Makalolo people lived there. I think some historians have set that record right".

"Ok, enough about those bloody claimants. When are you joining us for a drink or two?"

"My visit to Hwange and Victoria Falls was life-changing."

"I always say I don't care where you're, who you and what you do in this world, if you haven't been to the one and only Victoria Falls then you haven't LIVED! Simple. That's my story. So what's your story?"

Turning on the ignition key of my car, I replied, "I quit drinking".

When I got home, my wife was cooking. I adored the idea! The maid was playing with Buhle in our smallish backyard. I blamed my friend who had delayed me by asking little questions about trivia for the fact that my wife had arrived home earlier. I wanted to be the perfect gentleman of the house, the perfect husband of my lovely wife and the perfect father of my precious and precocious Buhle. As I relaxed on the couch, listening to some timeless musical ballads on the radio, I told myself: *Muzi, now that you're on the right course, don't retreat or regret or listen to your friends anymore. Listen to the echoes and rhythms of your wife's wishes and desires. Let them be your command. Dance only to the beats of her heart. Don't delight in transitory and risky foolishness. Let it be in flight. In fright. For this is your sunlight. To this end, no more coming late, no more betting and drinking sprees with fooling friends, no more ...*

I drifted into sleep. She woke me up after placing a huge multicolored plate on the circular table. In there was something finger-licking good. I could not resist salivating there and then. It was the magnetism, flavor and sight of isitshwala that had me coveting. This stiff maize meal is the staple food for many a Bulawayo resident. The maize corn is ground into flour called mealie-meal. With boiling water, the flour is cooked into thick porridge. For me, having isitshwala served with stewed vegetables and amasi for dinner was a feast made in heaven. Amasi is a Ndebele /Zulu/Xhosa term for fermented milk. In the olden days, amasi was traditionally prepared by preserving and storing unpasteurized cow's milk in a calabash container called igula. After fermentation, they would carefully separate umlaza, which is a watery substance from the creamy and tasty remainder, which is amasi.

"Please where is the clay pot and the wooden spoons?" I joked as we poured the thick liquid over the thick maize porridge with great enthusiasm.

"I'm not culturally and ideologically bankrupt, but those are in the archives. That's where they belong now!", she thundered in a borrowed commander-in-chief-like voice.

"Where do I belong, my commander-in-in chief?"

"You belong to me", she gestured a naughty gesture.

To say I was laughing like crazy is an understatement. I pitied my vibrating ribs.

I was fiercely proud of my turnaround, of my new behavior and of my renewed commitment to my family. To the best of my knowledge I was doing my level best to meet my family's needs. All that big change did not go unnoticed. My wife commended me for being there for them, for spending quality time with them. One day as I was driving home, I saw a road block ahead manned by two male traffic cops. They used internationally accepted hand signals to **beckon** and **stop me**. For a while I thought that their hand signals were professional and polite. However, it soon turned out that there was nothing honorable and courteous about their conduct. They just wanted to solicit for a bribe.

"Look guys, my car's roadworthy and my papers are in order, so why should I grease your palms?"

"Have you just arrived in the country? Are you a novice? Don't you know how bad the economy is?"

"I'm not immune from the economic hardships either."

"Then give us something, our throats are dry. We don't want to fine you".

"I don't have money. I'm busy. Please let me proceed?"

"You busy? We don't think so. Now keep us company."

They left me to my own devices. After waiting in vain for what seemed like an eternity, I thought about the boredom of explaining to my wife about the road ordeal and the possibility of an argument springing up, then I handed over a little bribe to one of the stubborn officers. Waiting was not worth the anxiety. In my fearful and imaginary world I could picture and hear my wife saying: *You know they are corrupt to the core. Why couldn't you just stuff a five dollar note into an officer's mouth and drive away? That kind of money wouldn't make a huge difference. Maybe the road ordeal is just a mere excuse.*

However, when I arrived home and narrated my road block story she exhibited amazing support, understanding and sympathy. I also mentioned to her how I witnessed other drivers parting with their hard-earned cash, fast foods and drinks, or airtime vouchers. Out of genuineness, frustration or an injured ego I vowed that no bribing police would ever get a penny from me in the future. I did not have hallucinations about the tragic reality on the ground. One did not need to be the brightest crayon in the box to know and acknowledge that corruption was in the DNA of the entire system of governance. I could not fathom how our once-beautiful nation had taken a turn for the worse. The rottenness of the system blew my socks off. Ordinary citizens were being ridiculed by the greedy and merciless authorities left, right and center.

Bioprofile of the author: Ndaba Sibanda is a Zimbabwean-born writer. He hails from Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second largest city. In 2005 he authored an epic, *Love O'clock*. He has since contributed to twenty-two published books including such international anthologies as *Poems For Haiti*, *A South African anthology*, *Snippets*, *Voices Of Peace*, *Black Communion*, *Ripples of Love*, *It's Time*, *Lost Coast Review*, *Summer 2014: Vol. 5, No. 3*, *Christmas Anthology by Longleaf(2013)*, *On the Rusk Issue Three (Volume 3)*, *Emanations: Foray into Forever*, *World Healing ~ World Peace Volume I: a poetry anthology (World Healing ~ World Peace 2014) (Volume 1)*, *Metaphor: Modern and Contemporary Poetry (Volume 1)*, *East Coast Literary Review: Spring Edition 2014* and *Eccentric Press Poetry Anthology (Volume I): Omni Diuersitas Portmanteau Volume 2(2014)*, , and *52 Loves(2015)*, *O Anthology (2015)* and *Crossing Lines Anthology(2015)*, *Pamplemousse Volumes 1 and 2(2015)* and *No Achilles(2015)*. Ndaba's poems, essays and short stories have been featured in many and various journals and magazines like: *The Piker Press*, *Bricolage*, *The Dying Goose*, *Lost Coast Review*, *Magazine* , *Whispering Prairie Press*, *Saraba Magazine*, *allAfrica.com*, *Jungle Jim*, *Outside In Literary & Travel Magazine* , *The Metric*, *Unlikely Stories*, *Santa Fe Writers Project - SFWP Journal*, *Elohi Gadugi - Elohi Gadugi Journal*, *The Subterranean Quarterly*, *Miracle* , *Red Bird Chapbooks* , *The Joker*, *Florida Flash*, *Fjords Review*, *storySouth*, *Annapurna Magazine*, *Festival Of Language*, *quiet Shorts*, *The African Street Writer*, *Poetry Potion.com*, *Books Live* , *Whispers and Poetrysoup* . His latest anthology, *The Dead Must Be Sobbing* was published in March 2013. Currently he lives in Angola.

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