

Tumi and the Looking Glass

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February 1, 2023



Kamo held a braai at his house on Saturday. Tumi decided to go there dressed as Slick Rick, sporting an eye patch, thick dangling medallions and necklaces, trinkets, and all. It wasn't a dress-up party or anything like that, he just felt like dressing up. And, because he had *The Art of Storytelling* playing on a loop all morning, he was already in a pleasantly Ricky D mood.

Firstly, he cut the old, peeling faux leather jacket he meant to throw out and made the eye patch. He wore it around the apartment and answered Kamo's calls like he was Slick Rick himself on the telephone in *The Show*. Then he shaped a bit of aluminium foil into two incisors, flashed it at Doug E Fresh (mirror, mirror on the wall), and asked who was the most fly of them all. Doug sat silent against the wall, and Tumi knew the crowns weren't enough to get even a tweet out of him.

He popped open his first beer at noon and horsed around the apartment until dusk.

Every so often, he visited his bathroom and pestered the mirror there with frivolous talk, hoping he'd say something Doug couldn't.

As the hour drew near to decide what to wear, he eagerly pulled out the old, oversized Madiba batik shirt, a pair of saffron corduroy pants, and white Chuck 70s he hadn't worn in years. And, for the staple of the tout ensemble, added Ricky D's medallions and necklaces which he'd fashioned out of polystyrene bits and the remaining pieces of foil. He rocked up late at the braai, all fresh and decked out, instantly turning Kamo's backyard into a playground for mildly insane adults. That's where he met Anele.

She belched out the loudest laughter of all her friends when Tumi entered the yard and assumed Ricky D's pose for the camera phones.

Her laughter made him feel a little flustered and ill at ease. But he quickly let the resonant sound of it drown in the wave of insanity ensuing around him—Kamo and the boys reminiscing about their days be-bopping and hip-hopping downtown Carfax and Bassline.

Every so often, he visited Kamo's bathroom and pestered the mirror there with frivolous talk.

When the braai-ed meat was ready, they all curled around the open fire while the buffet was being laid to the side of them. Anele sat next to Tumi but said nothing. She occasionally laughed, a little restrained, every time Kamo cracked a joke. In one delicate burst of laughter, the light beer in her hand slipped into the fire and, in a sudden flash, Tumi reached and grabbed it before it could spill.

Everyone cheered with applause and laughter. Anele cracked a gentle smile, her white teeth catching the warm light of the flames. She reached for Tumi's hand, un-cupped it, touched her palm to his, turned it, and studied its back in a gesture that seemed to imply concern. She let it go casually, smiled again, and said thank you in a light whisper. She then adjusted her stool inches away from the fire to align with his and, again, said nothing but the occasional laugh.

The air around the fire was febrile and filled with laughter, and the space between Tumi and Anele grew smaller and smaller until there was nothing between them. When the buffet table was set, Anele fixed a single dish which they both shared.

Eskom dismantled the light before midnight, and Kamo soon ran out of fire logs. This meant that the braai had ended as no one would say what time the power would return because no one had bothered to check the weekend's loadshedding schedule.

Anele followed Tumi home in her car. In the dark lounge, at his apartment, Ricky D's false necklaces hung down her bare breasts while he had her pinned to the wall.

He pulled her up onto the bureau below Doug and pressed closer to her. She pressed closer to him and softly bit into his lips. While gently suckling on their cannabis and cigarette burn, she blindly worked loose the eye patch, which had flipped open by then and showed both his squiffy eyes glistening in the dark. She pulled away quietly, and he could see her face lighted splendidly by the faint glow of the moonlit window, smiling in a most elegantly seductive showing he had hardly seen true of someone he had just met.

He watched her tie the eye patch around her braided hair and over her glinting eye. When she was done, he grabbed her by the thighs, put his hand in her short, pleated skirt, inched down her crotch, and pulled her thong to the side. She let him in straight off, and he knew she had been wet for some time.

Lights went on as she gasped, moaned, and searched his ear with her sweet beery tongue. Tumi adjusted his eyes to the light and stared at Doug on the wall behind Anele—stared at the man looking back at him in a portrait held by Doug. He wondered about the slightly receding hairline on the man's head and the light seemingly bouncing oddly off it. It puzzled him somehow, but he quickly withdrew his stare, refused to let Doug and the man distract him and make him go soft (this was not the ideal time), and so dismissed it as just the ceiling lamb playing tricks on him.

In the morning, they Uber-ed to Tokyo Star in Greenside and had breakfast and beer. They spent all Sunday morning there and spoke about the night at Kamo's and their few other enduring pleasures.

They left Greenside at midday and stopped at Melville on their way to fetch her car at his place. She had insisted they leave their cars, flirtatiously whispering that she wanted only his complete attention. They ordered cocktails at Six on 7th street and lounged there until the place started swarming with lights and UJ students.

Every so often, he visited the men's room and pestered the three mirrors there with frivolous talk.

By the time they learned each other's clan names and praises, the Joburg sun had long dipped behind the Botanical Gardens.

Tumi hailed another Uber, and they waited outside the bar for it. The July evening had a warm, velvety blur of tangerine over the old houses, making Anele's brown skin glow with patches of gold and vermilion. When the car arrived, Tumi opened the door for her, and before they could both climb in, leaned in her ear and, through the bar's loudened music pouring out onto the street, asked her to stay another night. She said yes.

On their way to his place, he ordered supper via the same service that ferried them.

They got to the apartment before the food arrived, as he stayed only five minutes away from Melville. And, while the delivery guy was picking up their order at the restaurant, they had sex again. This time on his bed.

Food arrived. Tumi put on his underwear and went to fetch it at the door. On his way past the lounge, he glanced at Doug and thought about asking him if *he* was still desirable, but quickly dashed straight to the door without a bother for an answer he knew wouldn't come.

He brought the food to bed. Anele told him then how she was allergic to sesame seeds and had forgotten to mention it when he asked her in the car what she preferred.

He gladly said it was okay; he'll have the bun she ordered, which came with sticky chicken wings and fried chips. He swapped his plain bun for her sesame and poppy seed bun. She looked at him funnily and, before he could bite into the bun, softly reminded him that last night at Kamo's braai, he explicitly mentioned around the fire that he was also allergic to sesame seeds.

He smiled, and she smiled, too. He slipped off his underwear, lay propped up on the pillow next to her, and said yes, he was allergic, and took a clean bite at the black and white encrusted bun.

She rubbed against him with her shoulder, her doubtful smile a small slit up the corner of her mouth.

'It's either you lie,' she said, 'or you overextend yourself to please. Which is it?'

'I like to please,' he replied, naturally.

'You must be a real darling to friends and family,' she said.

'I haven't seen the family in years,' he said, hesitantly. 'We don't get to cross paths... you know?'

She smiled again and was quiet.

'And Kamo,' he added, almost casually, 'before last night I had last seen in varsity.'

They ate and fell asleep in each other's arms. Or rather, Anele fell asleep in Tumi's arms. He lit a cigarette and lay there a little while wondering what Doug would say to the last words he said to

Anele. The absolute truth was that he had last seen Kamo at his wedding three years before. And knowing Doug, he felt little shame.

They woke up early Monday morning, for she had to rush to her place to get ready for work.

They kissed in the mist over the parking lot next to her car.

I hope to see you again soon, she said as she rolled down her window and reversed her car out of the parking spot. He smiled and waved good-bye. She waved back and said bye-bye with a soft and somewhat promising smile.

Tumi went back to sleep and dreamt he was in a Grimm's tale, and he stood, drenched in gold jewellery of bulky necklaces and armlets, before the true magic mirror. To whom he posed a question he couldn't quite remember when he awoke, and to which the true magic mirror replied plainly, as clear as day: 'And like mist at dawn, soon to perish at sunrise, soon to be forgotten.'

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