

## Loving To Own

By Abulele Mafuya

The water was getting cold, her fingers and toes beginning to shivel up like prunes. She didn't care. She was almost completely immersed in the tepid water, which was straited by a thick liquid bearing the lambent glow of blood, with only her head above it. From that vantage point, her eyes coursed the geography of the bathroom. The frosted glass window that attrited the sunlight flowing in; the cracked mirror, with smudges of blood filling the cracks; an all consuming sombreness imbuing the room; the unshod man who lay dying on the tile floor. She knew that in a few moments, the police would be there, asking questions and drawing conclusions. She didn't care.

The end had begun two hours before. It was the calm in his voice as he spoke the words that put asunder all she thought she'd known of their life together, the unapologetic manner in which he had communicated his unspeakable betrayal. It was that that had led to this.

*This.*

But could she, in good conscience, ascribe this to that? Though, to what else? A momentary madness of the mind? The evanescent subterfuge of a soul whose very fundament had been so rocked as to be completely undone? That undone soul's subtle theft of a moment in time, wedging the mind in the interstice between one moment of reason and the next, within a slight chink in the armour of rationale, where one's threshold is crossed, and one is capable of things, brutal things, ugly things, inhuman things, that in full consciousness one's conscience could never countenance? These were abstractions, she knew. Yet the madness that had infected her was undeniable. For what, but madness, could it be that drove her to end his life?

He had walked into the home they'd shared for the past eight years. Without introduction, as though it were the most normal thing in the world, he had announced that there was another woman in his life. That there had been for the past three years. And that she was pregnant. Into the quiet sanctuary of their home, though for years barren and unyielding, was sown the demon seed, and its efflorescence was this, tonight. Now, death and retribution hung in the air of their bathroom like the aftermath of an unkind word, into the flow of their lives, though of late stunted and stultifying, was introduced a character as dark and daunting as the seventh horseman of the apocalypse. And yet, she didn't care. *Couldn't. Couldn't care.* She couldn't care.

*How could you? How could you do this to me?*

His response didn't matter. No manner of speaking or spinning could undo what had been done. And, to be honest, the infidelity was not the issue. He was a man, after all; didn't all men indulge in this sort of unfaithfulness, revel in it? This infantile obsession with the forbidden fruit, that which social decorum dictates is out of your reach, was it not common to all of them? Was this not the same psychosis that led men to fuck outside of their colour line? To pursue the wives of other men? To fuck animals and objects, themselves and each other?

No, this was not the issue.

What was at issue here was twofold: what, for one, was so wrong with her that he should feel the need to go and plant his semen in some other woman's cunt? What was wrong with hers? Was it configured differently? Disfigured? Inapt? That he should seek to fuck himself into perpetuity through the cunt of another woman, where hers was there, had been there, for eight goddamn years of latex infections, chafing, tearing; his edict of consistent condom usage that brooked no laxity, her acquiescence against the unrelenting yearning to feel him inside her, to experience him, to share with him the intimacy of vulnerable, unguarded sex; *au naturel*, as nature intended. It was inexplicable, unfathomable. It was unforgivable.

Through the frosted glass, the sun's light became faint. Even the formerly effervescent eddies of dust, rising from a mantle of dirt on the windowpane, seemed to swirl more slowly, to lose their life force. The water had grown colder now and it seemed to have absorbed the hue of the blood flowing from her. Like a cool amniotic fluid, it seemed to draw closer to her, to nestle her almost, comfort her, hold her against itself in a loving, empathetic embrace. It was comforting, reassuring. She stuck an ear over the edge of the tub; in a distant auscultation, she tried to listen to the breathing of the man on the tiled floor. It seemed slowed, stunted, faltering. Death was beckoning. Insistently. It would not be denied.

The first part of what was *at issue* here bled into the second. How could he, as though it were the most natural thing in the world, take what rightfully belonged to her and give it to another woman? She bid her thoughts to be more pointed. What purpose did he have taking his dick to the cunt of this other woman as though he owned it? Not even protecting himself, not even imposing upon this other man-thieving bitch the same restriction he'd imposed on her, despite her pleading otherwise.

His dick. Their dick. Her dick. *My dick*.

It was not so much the organ to which she felt entitled – after all, do all men not follow their importunate dicks into these other vaginas? – as it was to the exclusivity of the pleasures wrought by its naked flesh. This much she felt she was owed. Had she not bidden her time? Begged and pleaded him to

do away with these condoms? To enter her as a man should a woman, to give her what she wanted: to feel his flesh against her flesh, to envelop his manhood in her femininity completely, to writhe with delight as they engaged in that most atavistic of fucks, where bodies are in and of another, raw, elemental. To bury his head in the depths of her vagina. To wrap his shaft in her juices. To feel the warmth of his orgasm against her walls. To have him stay there in the aftermath. To experience the tumescence of his manhood, to enjoy the deep breathing as the labefaction of their spent sexual energy pressed against their diaphragms; and for him to live through her, continue through her.

She felt she had spent enough time on their us to have earned that right. The right to have him, him her; to own. How often had they fought over it, this exclusivity? Too many times for her retention to keep count.

*Why not? Why won't you just fuck me?*

*I do fuck you.*

*You know what I mean. What it is, Moss, are you fucking someone else? Others? Are you fucking other people?*

*No.*

*Then what? Why won't you give me what I want, what I need. There are other means of contraception we can use. What? Are you disgusted by me? You think I'm unworthy of properly having what is essentially my penis?*

*What?*

*Yes, my penis. Yours. Mine. Ours.*

Had she been wrong she wondered – the water now stone cold, the blood now thick, the breath of the man heaving on the floor faltering yet more, the sun receding further and further into the crook of darkness.

No. No, ownership is implicit in love just as it is in all other things we work hard to obtain and maintain. My house, my car, my money, my life... my boyfriend, my girlfriend, my husband, my wife, my lover. As she had given herself over to him, was she unreasonable to expect him to give himself completely over to her? No, she had no doubt of that.

The distant sound of sirens drawing ever closer with the passing of each second punctuated her thoughts. The ambulance she'd called, she thought; the police doubtlessly in tow. She stole back to the

moment, two-and-some-odd hours ago now, that precipitated this end. This ending. The ending. The end.

She'd been getting ready to take a bath. Water running in the tub. Long day, hot day; wanted to wash the sweat away. He came in, kicked off his shoes. She went to greet him, embrace him, welcome him home. He spoke calmly, his metre structured, his form calculated, his phrases clinical, his delivery heartless. Another woman. Pregnant. Never mind who. By quickly advancing degrees, her shock grew into a dark, inexplicable horror. Her question, she recalled, caught him by surprise.

*You fucked another woman? Without a condom?*

Yes.

A moment's silence; lifetimes sinking into the abyss; eons sucked into the interstice.

*You took that dick, put into another woman, without a condom? And now she's pregnant?*

Not so much questions, as words released to hunt for meaning in a fog of confusion and uncertainty. Confirmation seared through her like a bolt of lightning. It struck her cold; she just stood there, her fury trapping her in catatonia. You could say, this is when the madness set in.

The water in the bath began to flow over the sides, he ran to close the taps. As he stood over water, she walked calmly into the kitchen, grabbed the biggest knife she could find, walked up behind him and, calm as the eye of a storm, brought her arm down against his back more times than she cared to count. Yelling. Yelping. Hollering. Crying. Then the sound of a body slumping lifelessly to the floor, its head crashing against the mirror on the way down; the retching of a body gasping for breath, fighting for life, procrastinating the inevitable. She stood over him; this body, this man, her man. She took the cellphone from his trouser pocket and dialled the emergency number.

*Yes, hello? Come quickly. I've killed my boyfriend. The address...*

Then, she'd crept into the bath, the hot water a salve for the day's frustrations all.

Now, two men burst through the front door, their raiment hinting to her that they were the rescuers, paramedics; the men whose work was to toy with the penumbra, where light and darkness intersect, life and death; agents of end and rebirth both, angels and demons; to draw back from or aid over the

precipice.

*Good. Good.*

The world before her had gradually been receding in deepening shades of darkness until, when the men came in, the world was no more to her than a blurred tableau and a series of indistinguishable sounds. She was in the throes of a kinesis, she knew, between this life and the next. There was no light, no tunnel; only a vast, cavernous abyss, as though before her eyes an unconscionable darkness was being expanded and deepened yet more – as she had taken the life of the man who was hers, now the God to whom she belonged was repossessing hers. Snatches of the life she was the throes of exiting stole into her abyss.

*She slit her wrists... pulse is weakening... she's dying... we were too late... how's he... fourteen deep lacerations on the back... gaping hole on the side of his forehead... his pulse... his pulse is still strong. I think... I think he's gonna make it...*

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