

WAITING FOR NELSON

a full length one act play by Mbaso Tsetsana

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Publishers

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WAITING FOR NELSON

Written by Mbaso Tsetsana

Cast (in order of appearance):

Tyson - A BLACK MALE IN HIS 50s

Langa- A BLACK MALE IN HIS 20s

David - A WHITE MALE IN HIS 20s

Ever - A BLACK FEMALE IN HER 20s

Khuleka - A BLACK FEMALE IN HER LATE 20s TO EARLY 30s

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

[A clearly fatigued looking character walks onto stage with a worn out briefcase. While his clothes are tattered, wearing an oversized waistcoat, battered pants and no shoes, his attitude is the complete opposite, evoking immense hope and courage. He dusts off his briefcase, pants and waistcoat and begins a long and complicated journey on stage until he reaches a character, pompous in nature, who mumbles inaudible ramblings on the phone - a type of nonsensical nonsense. Tyson is about to speak to him when he is hushed by a finger. Each time Tyson tries to interject, the index finger, like a Rottweiler standing guard at a gate, hushes him before he can speak.]

Pompous Politician:

(Laughing jovially)

Oh comrade, leadership of the Honourable Republic, these false but accurate, complex and quixotic truths that you are articulating do indeed cement that the chicken may have come before the egg, but it is the egg that gives life to the chicken.

(Beat)

Oh but of course my leadership! *Kusasa sihlangana neBOSASA*. Yes, yes, no, he *Gave In* to our demands. *What's On* the agenda? Ah, you know how it is my leader; a few beers at the Saxonwold tavern and then perhaps a...

(Clocks a clearly annoyed Tyson)

Sorry my leadership, could we perhaps *Zoom*... *Ahhhhhh*, I hear your leader. Let me deal with this and then... Yes Leader!

Amandla!

(He finally hangs up, and equally annoyed, finally turns his attention to Tyson. On noticing Tyson, his demeanor immediately changed)

Pompous Politician:

Comrade Tyson! Ah, it has been what... A year?

Tyson:

Ten Mr. Minister.

Pompous Politician:

Yes, yes! That's right! Ten. Those were the good old days, weren't they?

Tyson:

Which days exactly, Minister?

Pompous Politician:

You know? Being wined and dined in London. Visiting museums, conversing with the elite...

(Reminiscing until he feels Tyson's eyes on him, full of disdain)

Pompous Politician:

Erm... While we were vivaciously engaged in political discourse of course! Fighting for the people of this cowntry!

Tyson:

Yes, those were the days Minister. When we were woken up in the middle of the night by vicious dogs. While you, of course, vivaciously fought for the cowntry. When we were shot at with rubber bullets, and sometimes live ammunition, depending on the mood of the police that day. Yes, minister, those were definitely the days.

Pompous Politician:

What can I do for you Tyson?

Tyson:

Honourable Minister, I desperately need a job, and I was hoping..

Pompous Politician:

I'm going to stop you right there comrade, before you begin to hop on hoping.

(beat)

What do you take me for? Hm? Just because a few puppies chased you in the old days, and we met in a few meetings, you think what, that we're friends? That I'll degrade myself morally?

Tyson:

No Minister, I...

Pompous Politician:

Hey! Did I say I was done? You waltz in here like this country and this party owe you something!

Tyson:

Well, don't you?

Pompous Politician:

That's not the point! I will not abuse my position of power and sell favours for fortune. I will not! I cannot!

Tyson:

But Minister, please..

Pompous Politician:

The people come first Tyson.

Tyson:

Am I not a person? A part of those people? Whom you swore to give a better life to?

Pompous Politician:

That will be all Tyson.

Tyson:

Good day Minister.

[He bows and embarks on his long and complicated journey. Now deflated and incredibly fatigued, he stops. He watches cars go by. He takes a placard that has his credentials which read:
Struggle veteran. MK loyalist. Fought for your freedom.]

Tyson:

I may not have a formal education. I may not have gone to a fancy university, but I am an African. I owe my being to the comrades of 1976 and the slaughtered 80, yes 80, and not 69, at the Sharpeville Massacre, and the San whose desolate souls haunt the great expanses of the beautiful Cape - they who fell victim to the most merciless genocide our native land has ever seen, they who were the first to lose their lives in the struggle to defend our freedom and dependence and they who, as a people, perished in the result. Today, as a country, we keep an audible silence about these ancestors of the generations that live, fearful to admit the horror of a former deed, seeking to obliterate from our memories a cruel occurrence which, in its remembering, should teach us not and never to be inhuman again. I am the child of Nongqawuse. I am he who made it possible to trade in the world markets in diamonds, in gold, in the same food for which my stomach yearns. Being part of all these people, and in the knowledge that none dare contest that assertion, I shall claim that - I am an African. Am I formed of the migrants who left Europe to find a new home

on our native land? Whatever their own actions, do they remain still, part of me? As I stand here, jobless and nearly lifeless, I wonder, was the sacrifice worth it? Should I be proud to be a native of this land? Should I be proud to be an African?

[Tyson walks off stage as we segue to a shebeen.]

[SONG: A LOCAL UPBEAT HOUSE SONG PLAYS. The volume decreases]

Langa:

Sister K! Come on, what's going on tonight? No music, and the beers are warmer than breast milk. No man. You need to focus on service delivery.

Khuleka:

Langa! When last did you actually pay for a beer?

Langa:

No, but that doesn't mean the other patrons deserve lack of service.

Khuleka:

Voetsek wena! If you want to speak politics, go to Luthuli House! (in a panic) Dj, come on! Play some music. These people are beginning to get restless.

[A downtrodden Tyson walks into the shebeen. Langa spots him.]

Langa:

Tyson! Why the long face? No luck with your comrades?

Tyson:

Shut up and get me a beer.

[Langa brings his beers over and sits with Tyson. He offers him one. They simultaneously open the beer using their teeth. They stare at one another and then commence to drink.]

Langa:

Otherwise...?

Tyson:

Tell me something. What is your issue with my party?

Langa:

I don't have an issue with your party. I have an issue with the heralding of one man. A party is not one man. Do you not think that this Mandela thing been overdone?

Tyson:

Eh wena, that's close to blaspheming!

Langa:

My point exactly. We treat utata like he's God. Sure, he had a part to play in the fight for democracy. But what about Sobukwe, Biko and Hani? They were silenced. The apartheid government could not handle them. If Mandela was such a threat, don't you think that the government could've easily sorted him out like they did with Biko?

[Silence.]

I'm just saying man. On top of everything else, EVERYTHING is named after him.

Tyson:

You're being emotional. You're not addressing facts. Without his leadership and his remorse and sense of ubuntu, this country would have gone into a civil war.

Langa:

Leadership? What about Tambo? The government named an airport after him. Great. But ask a ten year old who Oliver Reginald Tambo is, and they'll probably tell you that it's a show on Mzansi Magic. Ask them who Mandela is, and they know. Why?

[Beat.]

Mandela was not and is not the ANC!

[Beat.]

I'm just saying what most people are afraid to express.

[Khuleka, who has been eavesdropping, chips in.]

Khuleka:

The man has a point though. Everything is named after him. Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Nelson Mandela Bridge, Mandela this, Mandela here. I mean, the guy is even on our money now. Utata is everywhere. Next thing you know, they'll name the days of the week after him. Mandela, Tuesdela, Wednesdela, Thursdela, Fridela, Saterdela, Sundela.

[They all laugh and drink. Throughout, Tyson and Langa, unknowingly have the same gestures, Khuleka being the only one who notices.]

David:

(To audience)

Kaff... Kaffer... Cafeteria. I'm in a freaken kaffeteria infested with coffee addicts who don't realize that this caffeine is killing them. These Kaff... Café lovers. Where the hell is she?

Langa:

What's this boy doing here at this time? People are brave these days neh? It's hot man...Yeses. I want a cold one. I NEED a cold one. I need a beer.

Tyson:

Don't do anything stupid.

Langa:

Relax old timer, I just want to speak to old chicken skin over there.

[Langa, very confidently and very gradually, walks towards David. David tries very hard to not notice him approaching.]

David:

Oh shit. No man. Not another one. Please God, not another one. It's your café. I get it. I get it. My café... Our café's, they closed down a long time ago. I'm not a café manager anymore. I don't want your café. Please, just leave me alone. Oh God, he's getting closer... Relax David... Breathe David... Run David!

[Everyone freezes and the music stops. Suddenly, the characters start to sing and dance to a devised rendition of Brenda Fassie's *Weekend Special*.]

Black Patrons:

They don't come around, to visit in the week. They don't understand, they're walking atm's. So on Friday night yes we know, we know we must get ready for them, get that money from them, on Friday night yes we know, we know we must be ready for them, we'll be waiting for them...

David:

We're no weekend, weekend specials. We're no weekend, weekend specials.

Black Patrons:

BUT you have... You have privilege, white white privilege; you have privilege, white white privilege.

[The song is hummed while David goes into his narrative.]

David:

(to audience)

So, it was a Friday night. I took Ever, that's my girlfriend, to a little spot in Braamfontein. We had an amazing night, but she seemed agitated and uncomfortable you know? So I asked her what was up and she said...

Khuleka:

[She makes the deaf tone that old television sets used to make when they had no network.]

David:

Exactly, right? Made no sense whatsoever. So, just as I was trying to listen and understand her, bam!

[The singing stops and there is silence.]

David:

Her bag, my wallet, my watch.³ darkies, gone like the wind. Now, I'm not trying to say they're all the same but...

Langa:

Eita.

David:

No sorry my guy, I use Vodacom.

Langa:

Funny guy hey? I like you. I like you.

David:

Thank God. OK. Now please leave.

David:

Thanks boet.

[Silence.]

Langa:

So, what's your name funny guy?

David:

My mother taught me never to speak to strangers hey.

[David laughs. Langa just stares at him.]

It's David.

[Silence.]

Langa:

Aren't you going to ask me what my name is?

David:

I wasn't going to. But I mean, if you want me to, then sure.

[Silence.]

Langa:

Well?

David:

Well what?

Langa:

Ask!

David:

Oh shit, yes of course. Sorry man. What's your name?

Langa:

It's Langa. It means "sun" in your language.

David:

My language?

Langa (cont'd):

Although I wonder sometimes why my mother named me that. I mean, I'm not a bright guy. Well, I try to be, but I'm not intelligent. Books have never been my thing.

But I'm clever. You see funny guy...

David:

It's... It's David hey.

Langa:

Askies. You see David, there's a difference between intelligent people and clever guys. Intelligent people base their evidence and opinions on books and facts. In essence, those opinions aren't really theirs. Clever people, on the other hand, people like us...

David:

Us?

Langa (cont'd):

...well, we use our environment AND books to formulate our own opinions. You see me? I'm a clever.

David (aside):

Shit. That's deep. I didn't expect that to come from... Well, from a kaffe-terian.

David:

Yeah. Listen man, I need to get going.

Langa:

Is it? Where to?

David:

I have an appointment with someone.

Langa:

An appointment? In Alex? At this time?

Langa (aside):

Son of a... He's probably fucking one of these township bitches. Why do we do this to ourselves? Why do we always seem to sell ourselves to *them*? Sell our souls to them?

Langa (cont'd):

So, funny g... David. Be honest man. What are you doing here? Alone? At this time of the night? It's not safe man.

David:

I'm just... You know, getting a feel of the real South African culture.

Langa:

The real South African culture? Oh. Okay. I see. So the part you live in, that's where the fake culture is?

David:

No! No, no, no! I didn't mean it like that.

Langa:

Well then how did you mean it David? Huh? You people forget us when business is going well. When we protest about toilets, or unemployment, you keep quiet and do nothing, while we wait. But when your people from overseas come, you bring them here.

David:

Listen Lungi...

Langa:

LANGA maan!

David:

Langa. Sorry. Listen bro, I think you're barking up the wrong tree here hey.

Langa:

So now I'm a dog?

David:

No. No. You're not getting me.

Langa:

Oh. So I'm stupid then?

David:

For fuck sakes, listen to me man! What I'm saying is you're speaking to the wrong guy here. Firstly, I'm not a politician. Secondly, I'm not the bloody government. You okes are... and HAVE been doing this to yourselves!

[Silence.]

Langa:

Funny guy. Tell me something, do you like beer?

David:

Do I like beer?

Langa:

Yes. Do you like beer?

David:

Uhm... Yeah. I guess so.

Langa:

Me too. And you know what the worst thing is? When you want beer and just don't have the money to get it. When you can't quench that thirst. I want a beer David.

David:

Well I hope you get it.

Langa:

Don't worry, I will. Do you believe in God David?

David:

What's up with all the...

Langa:

Answer the question. Do you believe in God?

David:

I... Yah. I think so.

[Langa pulls David to a secluded part of the shebeen.]

Langa:

(whispering)

Good. Because now would be a good time to pray to him. [He takes out a knife, stciking it to David, unseen by other patrons.] Phone. Wallet. Throw them to the floor. You move you die. You scream, you die.

David:

You've got to be kidding me.

Langa:

Hey! I said phone and wallet on the floor now!

David:

Ok! Ok! Relax. Relax. Here. Yes! He's trying to mug me.

[Langa turns around and in the split - second that he's distracted, David runs out of the shebeen.]

Langa:

Shit!

Tyson:

Outsmarted by a foreigner in your own back yard.

Langa:

Just shut up and get us another beer old man!

[The characters become neutral bodies, transforming the space, with Ever, pacing frantically in the forefront.

Absentmindedly, she positions herself to sit and a chair is placed for her before she falls over.]

SCENE TWO

[Ever sits anxiously on the chair, tapping her phone. She is clearly disturbed by something. She keeps checking her phone. She paces again and then attempts to bury herself with some school work but cannot focus. DAVID (OS) sounds the message tone.]

David (OS):

Ever! Where the hell were you last night? I waited for over half an hour. In bloody Alex! With my car! Do you know that I nearly got killed by some thug?

[Ever types on her phone. Khuleka sound scapes typing and a message tone.]

Khuleka:

Jeez David, I'm sorry OK. There was a situation at home. I'm sorry to hear about that. What happened? How did you manage to keep your phone though? You exaggerate things sometimes, you know that right?

[David sound - scapes incoming text message tone.]

David (OS):

Exaggerating?! A knife... A KNIFE was pulled on me Ever. Instead of saying "David, I'm glad you're OK", you tell me that I'm exaggerating. Jeez. Do you know what it's like for someone like me to be in a place like Alex? And then you tell me about a bloody situation!

[Ever types on her phone. Khuleka sound - scapes incoming text message tone.]

Khuleka:

Someone like you? A bloody situation? What the hell is that supposed to mean?

[David sound - scapes incoming text message tone.]

David:

OK. Listen, it's late. I'm really not keen to get into this now. I'll see you tomorrow.

[Ever reads the message. She types furiously.]

Khuleka:

You mother F... Delete, delete, delete, delete. Don't you dare sleep on me!

[Ever types. Khuleka sounds a message tone. Silence. Ever tries to call David. Khuleka sound - scapes the ringing.]

Khuleka:

You have reached the voicemail service of David. At the tone record your message, then press hash or just hang up.

[Ever exits, furious.]

SCENE THREE

[The cast walk on frantically, placing chairs and bring David onto stage. They mop the floor and powder David up with 'make-up'.]

Khuleka:

OK, now David sweetheart, you were prepped by the producers right? Only speak when spoken to and make sure you look at myself and into the camera. OK?

David:

Kelloggs, what the hell is going on here? Why are you talking like that?

Khuleka:

And none of your racist, dogmatic, sexist remarks, OK?

David:

Racist?! You of all people...

Langa:

And we're live in 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.

Khuleka (to audience):

Good evening ladies and gentlemen and welcome to another episode of...

Full Cast:

CHECK YOURSELF!

Khuleka:

As always, we bring you the hottest topics, and the most controversial figures. Tonight, we have David Shields with us. An introverted racist who fills his guilt by dating a black girl. Let's please give him a round of applause.

[The audience and cast clap.]

Khuleka:

David, welcome. Well, first things first, how long have you been a racist for?

David:

What the hell Keloggs? I'm not a racist man. You know that. I always give you tips, and talk to you.

Khuleka:

You've been coming to the Bannister Bistro for 2 years, yet you still call me Kelloggs and not Khuleka. What say you about that?

David:

I...

Khuleka:

Hold that thought David. We'll be back to hear what our new generation racist has to say about these claims.

[David is ignored during the 5 second break.]

Langa:

We're back in 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.

Khuleka:

Welcome back folks to Check yourself. So before the break David wanted (pause) Ladies and gentlemen, it seems we have David's girlfriend on the line. Yes Ever, you're live on air.

Ever:

Hi Lady K. I'm really glad that I'm finally being given this opportunity. For the last year and a half, I feel that David has been using me to delete his guilt. Because plain and simple, he's a racist. When his mom gives me a lift, the dogs sit in front, or at the back with me if David is there. That's just one of many examples.

David:

Bullshit Ever! You talk to me like I'm a racist. You're the one that has issues about being black. Hell, you hate being black, and you try to fill up that guilt by joining these silly dakie clubs on campus. Talking like a damn comrade and being shot by police won't change the fact that you can't stand looking at yourself in the mirror, and that being with me, more than fills that white emptiness that you feel.

[Silence. Again, the cast systematically re-arrange the stage. We are now at restuarant.]

SCENE FOUR

[Khuleka commences to mop the floor. She notices that David is asleep. She wakes him up. He seems traumatized.]

Khuleka:

And then?

David:

Shit! I just had a nightmare to end all nightmares. I was... You were... Shit Kelloggs!

Khuleka:

Khuleka.

David:

How much?

Khuleka:

Eish, never mind. You have weird dreams man. You were mumbling something about a talk show and forever.

David:

Ever. Kelloggs, tell me something. Do you think that I'm racist?

Khuleka:

Well, Mister David...

[Ever walks in. An upbeat and cheerful Khuleka approaches her and goes in for a hug.]

Ever:

(coldly)

I'll have a coffee. Three sugars. No milk.

[Ever sits down. A downtrodden and gutted Khuleka makes to exit. David joins her and things are awkward.]

David:

So I see you like your coffee black these days. What changed?
[David attempts to touch her hand.]

Ever:

No!

Khuleka (to audience):

Oh Jesu. These two are forever at it. My favorite regulars' neh, but yoh! Mister David has drama like David Genaro! And usisi there is like Helen Zille dancing to Xhosa songs. Let me go get their order. If you need anything, just shout neh?

[She exits to the kitchen area to get Ever's order.]

Ever:

David, how could you?

David:

How could I what? What are you on about?

Ever:

What am I... You slept on me!

David:

No. I actually slept on my bed, with a mattress, sheets, blanket...

Ever:

Yah, that's it. Make a joke of it.

David:

Ah come on babe. Why are you making a mountain out of a mole hill?

Ever:

Because you're a mole David. You're not only blind, you're also deaf.

David:

A mole. I can go with that. Better that than being a dog.

Ever:

David!

David:

Ever!

Ever:

You know what? I'm tired. I can't do this today. [David attempts to respond but stops himself. There is an awkward silence.]

David:

Come on Ever. This is us time. We're at our favorite kaffer.

Ever:

Excuse me?

David:

...teria! We're at our favorite cafeteria! Do we really have to fight?

[Ever gets up to leave.]

David:

OK. I'm sorry.

Ever:

Do you mean that?

David:

Of course I do. Why do you always doubt me?

Ever:

It's because you doubt yourself.

David:

What's that supposed to mean?

Ever:

Nothing. Just leave it.

David:

No. Tell me. Clearly you want to tell me something. Get it out.

[Hearing the commotion, Khuleka comes out to see what is going on.]

Ever:

I said leave it, OK? [She stands up.] I'll get a taxi, so don't worry about taking me home since people like you aren't meant to be in places like Alex. [She exits.]

[Frustrated, David takes out his cell phone to make a call. Ever walks back into the restaurant and is perplexed by what she hears.]

David:

Hey. Where are you? OK cool. Listen, do you mind coming over to the Bannister? I need to talk. Just cancel on him and tell him something came up. Babe, please man, I need you...

[Ever grabs the phone from David's ear.]

David:

What the hell?!

[He sees that it's Ever.]

Shit.

Ever:

Yeah. Shit. That didn't take you long. I leave for 5 minutes, and already you're organizing a floozy.

David:

You said you were leaving.

Ever:

And that means you can... You know what. It's fine. I can't.

David:

Can't what now?

Ever.

I just can't OK?

David.

Can't, or won't?

Ever:

David, I just can't OK! It's complicated.

David:

Then uncomplicate it for me.

Ever:

You wouldn't understand.

David:

Then make me understand!

Ever:

David, please. Just stop it. Stop pushing. [They sit in silence.]

David:

It's you that's doing the pushing Ever.

Ever:

What do you mean?

David:

You're pushing me away.

Ever:

Listen David, it's not as simple as we'd like it to be OK?

David:

Nothing is ever simple with you. And that's the truth.

Ever:

Truth? What is truth David?

David:

Could you please stop saying my name?

Ever:

Don't change the subject. What is the truth...? David?

David:

Your true feelings... For me.

Ever:

Would you like to hear some real truth David? I'm black, you're white. I'm a kaffer, with hair that a pencil can fit through. With a father and sister that live in a dilapidated shack.

David:

Ever, stop. Please, don't...

Ever:

No, no. We're speaking about the truth right? And you? You're white. Umlungu. The supposed white scum of the sea. Scum. Wow. That actually makes me laugh. How can you be scum? I mean, you live in houses with bedrooms that you don't even use. You go to the police, they take you seriously. We go to the police, it's either we deserved it or we were the cause of whatever it was that happened.

David: