

FR Khumalo

## The Three Gifts

The music was blustering and he was freezing, he opened his eyes and it was completely dark he tried straining his eyes to get a glimpse of any light. He felt groggy he couldn't tell if it was the alcohol or the strong paraffin smell filling his lungs. He knew what was stuffed in his mouth was a cloth used to apply homemade floor polish with; the cold had made it rigid. It was properly tied behind his head with a rope, he didn't know if the ropes used to hogtie him had stopped his blood circulation or if it was the cold. He tried to scream but he knew he was the only one hearing himself, the fans hummed ludicrously, he was in a cold room.

Mamsy's place had always been favorite local drinking spot, actually Mamsy had passed away years ago, it was her only daughter Lucy who was in charge now, with the help of her uncle Pat, and the local thug turned bartender Sam. Lucy, short and light skinned, with temper to tell the inebriated men how their loins where shriveled, had quit her job of 17 years at the post office when her mother passed away and legitimized the shebeen. Pat slender, dark and some say he never wore anything but formal, despite never having a formal work in his life always seemed to always be doing good. Samuel exact opposite of Pat physically, had been hired by Lucy, perhaps she saw him as a son she never had.

In the middle of the month Mamsy's was not too packed about twenty something regulars, Pat took over as Sam went for a smoke break. He had left via the cold room and went outside at the backdoor for a cigarette break. The space for loading in the front of the cold room was not too big and the light bulb had burnt out few days prior. He was startled as he turned to go back inside, 'damn it Dorks', slumped in a corner in the dark, blacked out, head hanging and back propped against the coarse wall. Sam shook him three times, dorks

snored loudly over the juke box ruckus. Like a person who had remembered an answer to a question he was asked he went inside.

Lucy was sitting down by her make shift office kitchen doing her books. 'I got it sis Lu' he stepped in the room, face calm but smiling with a corner of his mouth, more of a smirk, 'you got it?' Lucy didn't turn just asked while concentrating on her task. 'You got what?' she turned around with boredom on her face.

Dorks was somewhat smart at school, he had dreams of becoming a traffic cop. He was an open guy had a three year old son. He had hit a rebellious phase more later than his peers, 'alcohol and smoking drugs won't get you anywhere my boy' his mother would say upon hearing how he sleeps anywhere when his drunk. That was the same song and dance he endured after every morning after from his mother. Coupled with the fact his child's mother had left him for the same reason; 'you don't want to grow up I can't deal with your embarrassments any more' that's what she told him two years ago. He had tried to win her over for few weeks after but always came up short.

'Park the car in front of the door when you're done' Sam and Pat where instructed. Everything was done quickly and efficiently. Closing time was around two, and the regulars like stubborn cattle's were driven out eventually. Fortune was growing and since two years ago her tavern had been steadily prospering, and she had even been able to extend and renovate the building. Lucy's mother had always told her 'take charge of your life and you never go hungry' she took that advice and had never looked back. The man who helped her mother, and now her, was very strict when it came to how 'gifts' where presented. He praised himself on efficiency, 'if you do what I instruct you will never fail'.

At three the door cricked and the light came flooding in blinding Dorks. If it wasn't for the rag in his mouth with teeth would had been clinging. The men entered, 'what are you doing?! Help! Help!' only in him in his mind knew what he was saying, the three people heard only heard muffled mourns, he knew what this was, tears rolled on the cold skin only deep muffled mourns came out. Front hogtied, he wriggled violently. The two men said nothing they just surrounded him like how wild dogs would surround an injured animal. Each man grabbing him under the underarms as the woman opened the outside door of the freezer room, his coccyx dragging on the cold hard floor. Snuffled mourns filled the quite night, he was lifted up to the waiting Nissan NP300. Both men got in with him and the woman shut the door of the canopy.

Dorks grew up hearing stories of how some, if not all business owners made sacrifices, a head found in a fridge here, a mutilated body discovered in some shrubs, a child missing to be discovered months later. 'If a stranger offered you candy or a lift on their car, run and never look back'. Now here he was in the dark, pinned down on the shoulder by the knee of one of the men. The more he thought of what would happen to him the more tears just streamed on. The bakkie seemed to go on for ages, then the ride got bumpy, it was on gravel road, some bumps where so much that they left the rhino lined floor of the vehicle. The vehicle came to a standstill, Dorks wailed more and his captures kept mum. He heard the driver door open and shut, few seconds the canopy door opened and he was sledged out. Like a sack of sand he hit the ground, he groaned hard. He was dragged towards a fence pole, the knife he saw flash from the woman made him wriggle and convulse more.

The fence pole he was dragged to fenced the maize field, hectares and hectares of maize field. Dorks knew this area, when he was younger few boys and him would come and steal few some maize ears. The woman kneeled in front of Dorks, opened what seemed to be huge Tupperware container then took out three candles and lit them, put them in a triangle formation around Dorks.

The harvest season had passed, all that was left was the dry endless field of maize stocks. Full hysteria ran through the victim, he understood what all those animals that got sacrificed felt like. His blood would be spilt for someone else's livelihood.

'Dorks you will part of our family today' the woman said still kneeling down in front of him, the men stood on his sides, aligned like the red candles. Dorks muffled moans came to a halt, eyes filled tears glistening with the help of candle light in the moonless night, she began humming then, then started praying. Only Dorks noticed that the mad woman was praying to him. Barely audible she whispered gently with tears running down her cheeks staring intently at the sacrificial goat. Dorks could swear his spirit was being pulled from him. If he was a deity he would grant the prayers of this pleading woman, but Dorks was no God he felt his body being paralyzed by the truth he knew, the inevitable truth surrounding him. As the woman ended her prayer. She knew the importance of tradition, which came with taking charge of your life. She knew words have consequences especially if you were about to slaughter a human. For the past years the exact spot at exactly in the morning. Five people had given her the three gifts, the head, the foot and the genitals. Letting them know what purpose they would play in their demise and saying the prayer taught by the Witch Doctor.

'The only time you talk to the 'giver' is when you tell them they will be part of you' The Doctor was a man of few words so his instructions can never be forgotten. The woman figured that's why he hardly spoke, to never lose importance in chit chat. Lucy's mother only believed in herbs only. Lucy had taken her mother's advice and decided she won't be poor like her. The doctor would always 'say speak life and life will happen' Lucy spoke life, and had saw her life happening. The prayer Dorks heard was that 'life' spoken to him.

Dorks wept, the men pinned him firmly against the pole. It was clear the woman would be doing the cutting. She had resumed her praying, as she pulled picked up the knife from beside her, then like a car collision, she seemed to be in rabid hysteria, the men broke in full unison repetition of what she was screaming. She grabbed the right feet, she slashed the boot laces, took the shoe off and tossed it away. Dorks felt like his bones were being crushed by the weight of the men holding him down. The ropes felt like they had already cut him more. His throat was dry like he had no more saliva. The twenty centimeter knife made contact with the skin, he felt it run through his muscles, his scream seemed to pass through the rag in his mouth, and the woman putting pressure from her shoulder slicing passionately was in unison with the men. 'Give me your mind, give me your body, give me your light' was the last thing he heard as his body gave out and passed out.