FLASH NONFICTION

Gogo

by Fezeka Mkhabela



"Ethnic gold queen of all cultures" by Tataru Alexandra Emanuela

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My grandmother rose with the sun as it warmed the earth. Our alarm clock was the sound of the chicken's cluck. My bed felt like the kaleidoscopic land of dreams and I fought desperately to lay there and remain lost in a sea of fantastic thoughts when my grandmother, MaMeyiwa, roared at me to wake up. This was the spirit of the morning.

She would instruct me to make the bed and I would do so in mourning of my sleep. She ran my bath water, taking into careful consideration its temperature by making small waves with her hands. Not too hot and not too cold. I climbed into the water and she would take a green bar of soap, rub it gently onto my wet pink towel and cleanse my body.

"Gogo, why do we have to wake up so early?" I mumbled.

"My child," she laughed, "today we are going to collect the pension. We have to be early so we are first in line and then we need to set up our stall at the market."

Once she finished bathing me, I stayed a bit longer in the tub, enjoying the calm of soaking up the water while she ironed our clothes and prepared our breakfast. When I was ready, I carefully climbed out, wiped my small body and walked into our room. Delicately, I put on the green dress and warm stockings she had laid out for me on the bed. My fingers ran from one button to the next, making sure they were all in the right place.

Our breakfast was a hot and delicious bowl of maize porridge. Gogo loved to add brown sugar together with peanut butter and mix it in gently until it was perfectly smooth. To cool it down for me, she ran the spoon along the edge of the porridge, lining small fragments of the delicacy. Then she scooped it up and melted it into my mouth.

"Keep doing this," she instructed me and was off to get herself dressed and to pack her traditional beadwork and clothing into her jumbo plastic bag for the market.

I watched her familiar body disappear into the hallway and my eyes would wander around her lovely home, decorated with paintings of Black women carrying baskets on their heads opposite images of a pale St. Anne holding baby Mary. It comforted me in the same way her presence gave me peace.

My grandmother was a businessperson. Her favourite days of the month were pension collection days because she received two incomes: The first was from the government and the second from her beautiful collection of colourful jewellery, carefully woven together with the laws of sacred geometry, which she would make by hand, using tribal beads called *ubuhlali*. Her work was magnificent and it reminded me of my dreams where the guardian angels of Africa came to whisper secrets into my tiny ears and they too were adorned in my grandmother's exquisite pieces of *ubuhlali*.

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It was still the early hours of dawn by the time we left home and the chilly air would pierce our winter jackets.

“My child, in this world, you have to get up early to work. When I was a young girl, my mother put packets of food into my bra so I could look for work because the shopkeepers would not hire you if you were too young. I was quick to learn that in life you must work or you don’t eat,” she reminded me.

We walked up a steep hill to the taxi stop called e-Dhano. When we saw a taxi approaching, she lifted her left arm and pointed her index finger into the air. It took at least three attempts before one stopped with enough space for us inside.

I observed my grandmother, who was fair-skinned. The wrinkles on her face stood out in the cold, but they told the story of a journey I could not yet comprehend but one I felt deeply connected to.

“Sanibonani,” she greeted the driver and the passengers as we climbed into the stuffy inside. The door slammed shut and off we drove towards the sunrise.

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