

# The Body

*He stares at her quiet, peaceful face.*

*So much love in that face. Such passion.*

*This woman embodies everything he ever envisioned love to be. She is caring, intelligent, sensual, sensuous. A beautiful person inside and out.*

*Looking at her now ... That body ... underneath those covers, that body's the same.*

*How strange to be thinking about its eroticism at this moment.*

*This is the thing about his body. It always betrays him. Even now. The shame of it.*

*Yet here she is. Voluptuous, smooth, perfect, naked in his bed.*

*The thought stirs something in him. Unbelievable. That his body can be responding so rudely in the circumstances.*

*He collapses to the floor, weeping.*

*Can it really be over? He thinks of all the good times they've shared. The laughs, the kisses, rubbing her feet ... The passion!*

*The remains of their meal are still there, their empty wine glasses on the table. As his heart constricts with loss, the tears roll down his face. He is a heap of grief.*

*Suddenly, a new emotion takes over.*

*It is fear.*

*What is he going to do with this beautiful body now lying so still – and so finite – in his bed?*

*He will have to call someone.*

*An ambulance? No, too late for that.*

*The police? No! No police, not for a man like him.*

*Her husband? And say what exactly?*

*Oh shit, oh shit! What has he done?*

## The Manamelas

‘Nomathando! Sweetheart! Come, we’re running late. Noma!’

After twenty-seven years of marriage, he still could not believe how long it took his wife to prepare for occasions. And this wasn’t even an occasion. They were just going out for a quiet early dinner, trying out a new restaurant up the road that had been featured in one or other glossy magazine. It didn’t matter to Noma. It could be something as banal as a visit to an old friend, a family braai or a PTA meeting, yet she’d still go to great lengths to ensure she was the most beautiful woman in the room.

As he regarded his reflection in the antique gilt mirror in their ostentatious foyer, he tried to calculate how many hours he had spent waiting for his wife. How long on average?

After taking a shower, it took her probably one to two hours to prepare for an occasion. Never less than that. Not ever.

If he calculated the number of events and occasions they attended every year, he reckoned her preparation time clocked up to about 100 hours per annum.

He found himself taking out his smartphone and clicking on the calculator app.

He sat down on the occasional chair beneath the arched staircase that led to one of the three floors in their behemoth of a house.

He typed in  $1.5 \text{ hours} \times 100 \times 27 \text{ years}$ .

He had been waiting on this woman for approximately 4 050 hours.

If you divided those hours by 24, this amounted to 168.5 days of waiting for the same woman over a 27-year lifespan.

More than five months of waiting for someone to finish applying her make-up, switching between two to three outfits until she found the perfect one to suit the occasion. Then more waiting for her to match the bag, the shoes, the jewellery ... endless waiting.

He shook his head.

Were they all worth it? All these hours of waiting?

He heard her velvety voice dripping down the staircase.

‘Ratu, look! What do you think?’ she said, twirling to show off her designer dress, matching shoes and bag.

He looked up the stairs to catch a view of the five-month (and counting) exercise in vanity. He considered her face, now lined with a few crow’s feet and laugh lines in spite of her regular ‘visits’ to the skin clinic and the expensive creams that lined her bathroom cabinet and vanity closet. He took in her chocolate skin, long legs, curvy body, tiny waist.

He was quiet for longer than was comfortable. Especially for his wife.

‘Well?’

‘Honey ... I’ve never seen you looking more exquisite, but ...’

‘But what?’

‘Won’t you be cold in that thin material?’

‘It’s not for now, silly – it’s for Zimbali. It’s always hot down there, even in winter.’

‘But Zimbali’s only next weekend.’ His stomach rumbled.

‘I know that. I’m going to change for lunch in a minute. I just wanted you to approve my choice of outfit for the social club event.’ She posed and pouted. ‘Am I going to be the most gorgeous creature in the room?’

Like a well-rehearsed thespian, he responded, ‘You’re always the most gorgeous creature – in the room, in Zimbali, in the world!’

He knew his lines.

His wife blew him a kiss.

‘I’ll just be a minute,’ she said.