

CHANGING ROOMS

WRITTEN BY TAMMANY BARTON

First performed 3rd July 2020

National Arts Festival,

South Africa

Tammany.barton@gmail.com

076 5011 351

Changing Rooms By Tammany Barton

Characters:

Lauren: A white woman in her late 20s.

Winston: A black man in his 50s.

A Friday afternoon. A dressing room in a cozy little clothing store. A curtain separates the two characters. Lauren on the left and inside the change room, a few dresses hanging above her on the rail. Winston on the right of the curtain surrounded by clothing racks, scarfs and a wall adorned with hats. Both characters facing the audience. Winston is neatly hanging up a suit right next to the change room curtain. Lauren sits staring at the dresses around her. She never tries on a single dress.

Winston: That's the third dress you've tried on.

Lauren: Women right? Hard to make up the mind.

Winston: My daughter will help you, she should be here soon. *(To himself.)* Stupid boyfriend.

Lauren: *(Overhearing.)* Keeping her from work hey?

Winston: Not good for the family business.

Lauren: Daughters?

Winston: Boyfriends.

Lauren smiles.

Lauren: I don't really have much experience.

Winston: Fifty years this business has been running. I took it over from my late father twenty five years ago. "Mabuza's Fashion." It's Lesedi's turn now, and she's late. Why? Boys! "Yes daddy I'll take over the business one day. Yes daddy, I want to be Miss Mabuza's fashion. Yes daddy, yes daddy." And here I am... waiting and waiting.*(Beat.)* How does that one fit?

Lauren: *(Pretending to have tried on a dress.)* Great. I'm not sure it's the right one yet though. *(Beat.)* So you only have the one daughter ?

Winston: My other daughter will come home when the cows do. But, no lobola, so no cows. She left home to play house house in the suburbs with her "friend." Her father's shop isn't good enough for her either.

Lauren: I'm sure she has her reasons.

Winston: There is never a reason to throw away a business with a good name.

Lauren: Maybe she found something else she wanted to do instead? You know, follow her dreams? Love maybe?

Winston: Love? She didn't have to go out and find it in the city! My father built this from scratch, with nothing but love! Love, is right here in this shop. *(Clicks his tongue.)* I'd rather let it burn than give it to someone I don't know! Sorry - I'm talking to myself - What do you need that dress for anyway?

Lauren: Just a funeral ...

Winston: A funeral? But, yellow is a colour for celebrations? *(Beat.)* Okay, Lesedi will be here soon. She'll help you.

Lauren: Trust me to pick the wrong colour dress and the one colour she hates. *(Beat.)* When she was a little girl, she shared her room with her younger sister, the room was yellow. "Floor to bloody ceiling." She'd explain using her long lanky arms to show me just how much yellow there was. She said the yellow was so loud it kept her awake at night. Our first flat we lived in had a mustard yellow wall in the living room, the same colour as your shop curtains. She wanted to keep the wall that colour. The loud room we called it. We painted everything else white.

Winston hands a black dress through the curtain.

Winston: *(Warmly.)* Here. This one's better.

Lauren takes the dress she holds it closely.

Lauren: Thank you. *(To herself.)* 10 years my love. *(To Winston.)* Can I ask you something?

Winston: My daughter will know how that dress works. You will need to wait. Otherwise you must come back tomorrow.

Lauren: No, um.. I've got the dress. Thanks. *(Beat.)* Your other daughter. Do you know who she played house house with?

Winston: You mean who she married?

Lauren: Yes.

Winston: Some white woman.

Lauren: That must have been hard on the family.

Winston: (*Abruptly.*) Does that dress fit? You must hurry now, I want to close the shop.
My daughter isn't coming.

Lauren: (*Bravely.*) She was happy.

Winston: Excuse me?

Lauren: Nolwazi, your other daughter. She was happy.

Winston: What?

Lauren: We met in our first year at university. There were instant sparks between us,
I've never meant anyone like her. (*Beat.*) I think I loved her the moment I saw
her. She showed me what family meant. (*Beat.*) She must have gotten that
from somewhere.

Winston: You won't find what you are looking for here.

Lauren: She was good with numbers too, you know that.

Winston: I don't know what you are talking about.

Lauren: She told me that when she was little, she would spend her weekends here, with you. Sitting on your lap counting the coins with her delicate little fingers pushing the money around the front desk. One rand, two rand, three rand. She learnt how to count here, in this shop, with you. She always spoke with such a deep love for you Mr Mabuza.

Lauren and Winston move closer towards the curtain.

Winston: You must leave.

Lauren: That's why I could never understand why you ignored us. She said you were kind and loving and that you just didn't understand how two people of the same sex could love each other, that's all. (Beat.) We reminded each other of that all the time...

Winston: You don't know my daughter!

Lauren smiles.

Lauren: She loved being a big sister to Lesedi. Lesedi visited us sometimes, when I could come up with a good enough lie to get her to tell you.

Winston: You kept her away from me with your lies.

Lauren: I tried to bring us together.

Winston: My wife died because of Nolwazi. Her mother drank herself to death when she found out about you. Did she tell you that!?

Lauren: Rubbish! She just said no to you and yes to herself. She chose to live a life she loved. You chose not to be a part of it.

Winston: She turned her back on us.

Lauren: You turned your back on her!

Winston: Typical Nolwazi, sending someone else to do her dirty work. Never taking responsibility for her own actions.

Lauren: Why didn't you just come?

Winston: Did she send you here?

Lauren: We invited you to our wedding and you never came. We asked for your blessing and you ignored us.

Winston: Did she send you here?

Lauren: (*Breaks down.*) We just wanted to share our love with you...

Winston: Did she send you here?!

Lauren: Be a family...

Winston: Did she send you here!!!

Lauren: YES! (*Whisper.*) Yes...

Winston: See, I'm right. That one... no responsibility. She didn't even come to her mother's funeral.

Lauren: We were there. She knew you would chase her away, so we sat in the car behind the gum trees. We watched you bury Mamma Bhule.

Winston: Don't you dare say her name.

Lauren: I watched Nolwazi watch you collapse to the ground, burying the woman you loved. Then I watched the woman I love bury her own love for you, knowing she would never be welcomed home again. I tried for years to help her see that we could build this relationship. But I understand now why it was impossible.

Winston: She broke her mother's heart. You tell her that! You tell her she sent her mother to her grave. And this is all that's left of the Mabuza family!

Lauren: It's too late.

Winston: What ?

Lauren opens the curtain looking at Winston.

Lauren: I came here today to ask you a question Mr Mabuza. To ask you to help me bury Nolwazi next to her mother. To find a way, even in her death, to be a family.

Winston: What are you saying?

Lauren: But I see now that was mistake.

Winston: Wait. What? Nolwazi is...

Lauren: Dead. (*Beat.*) I held onto her memory of you. Ignoring your hate for her marrying a woman. "Disrespecting" the family. But all that is left of that man she loved are these yellow curtains.

Winston: My daughter is dead?

Lauren: Yes.

Winston: My daughter is never coming home?

Lauren: No.

Winston: How?

Lauren: Cancer. It was quick. I wanted to come sooner.

Winston sits down.

Winston: It can't be...

Lauren: I'm sorry.

Lauren sits down. They sit side by side in their respective "changing room." There is silence for some time.

Winston: Her fingers weren't delicate and little. They were fat and juicy, counting one rand, two rand, five rand, three rand. "Daddy count with me, count with me daddy." ... She got it right eventually.

Winston looks at Lauren.

Winston: So you're the Lauren she told us about?

Lauren looks at Winston.

Lauren: Yes. *(Beat.)* Lauren – Lauren Mabuza.

THE END