



Hakuna Matata

By Elise Williams 12L

You knew what all Nigerians were like - all of your last semester was spent studying their history, their culture, their lifestyle. You'd seen her go inside, every day for almost a whole week, her tight uniform hugging her figure as she walked. Her hair was as foreign as her face; small, tight braids were drawn back into a high bun that perched jauntily on top of her head. She intrigued you, reminding you of the months you had spent studying African colonies at university (although you couldn't quite tell whether she was Yoruba or Igbo).

On the sixth day, you went into the restaurant and sat alone in a booth in her section. She came over and asked what you wanted to order, efficiently reading you the daily specials. But you were too busy looking at the freckles dotted across her nose like coloured sprinkles on an ice cream sundae. You asked her where in Nigeria she was from, and her full lips parted in surprise when you had correctly guessed that she was Igbo.

Every night you would sit in the same booth, and watch as she danced across the room. She laughed with the dark skinned waitresses, discreetly curled her lip at disagreeable customers, and always awkwardly picked at her short fingernails while she waited for a tip. She was tall; her slumped shoulders told you of her insecurities. Your eyes followed her unabashedly, and although she pretended not to see, she watched you from the corner of her eye.

You were waiting for her outside, listening to Midlake, when her shift finally ended. You boldly asked her if she wanted to go out with you. Your eyes lingered on her angular face and her doe-like eyes met your flecked green ones. She said no. However, when she turned away her face flickered with self doubt, a hesitancy which only lingered for a second - then she was gone. You wondered how long it would take.

She was uncomfortable with the attention, you decided, after the third time she had rejected your advances. Even so, there was something about her that was so captivating that you couldn't leave her alone. She wouldn't say no forever, and on the fifth day when you showed up you didn't even need to ask. There was desperation in her face, as if she thought you would slip through her fingers if she waited one more day. You didn't understand what had brought this sudden change ... but all you needed to know was that you had won. You went out to Chang's the next night.

The stories she told you of her childhood surprised you - how her father begged for forgiveness from a rich man, lying in the middle of the road. How she couldn't bear to look at him afterwards. It reminded you of all



the times you had broken something, and your father had simply pulled his chequebook out of his pocket. He still allowed you to go with them to Switzerland most years though, because of your impressively high marks. Unlike your half-brother, from your father's first marriage, who always ostentatiously bragged about his successful career as a heart surgeon, you distanced yourself. They looked down upon your interests, they compared you to your brother, and they hated that you didn't do exactly what they told you to. Your mother called it "male entitlement" when in reality you were just never interested in law school.

You didn't want her to meet your parents, not because you were concerned about their reaction to your relationship, but because they didn't deserve to meet her. Nonetheless, when she asked, you promptly agreed to introduce them. Their facade at dinner was commendable, possibly the longest you'd gone without hearing an insulting remark about anthropology - of course, they brought up William's successful career at every opportunity, but that was to be expected. After they left, you told her about your issues with your parents. She feigned interest at first, but couldn't comprehend how they had completely screwed up your entire childhood, dictating every single aspect. Someone like her would never understand, but there was nothing you could do about that.

One evening when she came over you gave her a beautifully hand-crafted snowglobe. The tiny ballerina slowly spun around, like in a child's toy; it was nostalgic. To your surprise, when you gave it to her she told you to stop buying her gifts, to stop spoiling her. You were offended, angry even, but you weren't going to stop buying her presents that she deserved, even if she was wary of accepting them. It was then you knew she needed you, but also that she was so very afraid of admitting it.

It was a Sunday when she told you that her father had died. You held her, stroked her hair, and gently whispered how everything would be okay, how you would go back with her to Lagos to visit her family. When she said she was going back alone, your arm (that was circled around her waist) tightened in surprise. You remembered that day on Long Island, when you had fought about going to visit her family because she didn't want you gawking at 'poor people'. You yelled at her for calling you self-righteous when she was the one who had generalised all white Americans as ignorant the previous week; she was the one who assumed nobody knew anything about her culture when she wouldn't even talk about it until you asked her to. It wasn't brought up again. She would change her mind.

When you drove her to the airport on Thursday you were still waiting, and you embraced and stood there for what felt like hours, her forehead pressed gently against yours. And when she finally let go, her eyes flickered as if she was remembering every single moment you had shared all at once ... and you thought she was going to kiss you, and tell you that she needed you in her life; that she was going to stay and it would be like nothing had changed. She hesitated. Then she was gone.