

Short Story: Josephine, My Love

Level: A2-B1-B2

Love at first sight

I loved her the very instant I saw her, God knows I did. Josephine.

She was a beauty, and still is, though I haven't seen her in such a long time. I wish I could.

We met when I was fourteen years old. She was fifteen.

My parents sent me to my paternal home village last year in summer.

"This boy needs to toughen up," I heard my father tell my mother at the breakfast table. "He needs to see how other people live."

My mother did not really want to send me away. She rarely saw us during the day because of her job and holidays are a great opportunity for her to catch up on the duties of motherhood.

"We can go there together at Christmas. Everyone will be happy. He is too young to be sent off like that on his own. His friends are here. His whole life is here. We don't even know how they will look after him there."

There were many reasons why those holidays were important to my father. I couldn't grasp the true meaning of those reasons at the time even though my father tried to explain them to me. It was later on, much later on, that I understood those salient reasons.

It was tough for my mother to let me go. She wrestled with this issue for a long time. Why was I being sent there alone? Why couldn't I go there with my siblings? Why couldn't she come along with me? Why couldn't my father accompany me? Why couldn't my cousins from the village visit us?

In the end, she did let me go, half-heartedly. I was so disappointed. Secretly, I had hoped that I would be able to stay in the city. They were so many things to do that summer in Blantyre that I could not imagine wasting my life in some remote village with no running water and electricity. I felt like my father was punishing me for my poor performance at school that year. I felt like my father was abandoning me, giving up on me. With hindsight, I know this is one of the best decisions he ever took regarding my upbringing. It was a decision that came from a place of love.

Those holidays did change my life.

I saw Josephine the very first day I arrived in Bolero. She was passing by my grandparents' house and my cousin, Cecilia, chatted with her for a few minutes. I could barely make out her features but I knew that I had never felt that way before. I wanted to see this girl again, it was such an urgent need, it almost felt painful. That fleeting image would haunt me for days: her smile and soft laughter, her plump figure, her smooth skin that reminded me of ripe mangoes... I remembered everything about her.

I remembered her neat rows of pleated hair that glistened in the sun. I remembered her dimples, her disarming smile, her nonchalance, her everything. Her picture was so clear in my head, the clothes that she wore, the shoes that she put on, the words that she said! It was if I had been there to photograph each and every second of her existence because I knew that this would be the very last time I would be seeing her at such close range. The pictures I took in my head would keep me restless for endless days and nights.

I really wanted to see this girl again. It was almost a matter of life and death.

I had so many questions for Cecilia. Who was that lovely girl? Where did she live? Did she go to the same school as Cecilia? Could we go to her house together? Could we just see her again, one more time? One last time?

"That's your namesake," Cecilia teased me, her eyes gleaming with mischief. "Namesakes are meant to be with each other. Namesakes are supposed to love each other until death do them apart."

I didn't understand.

"Joseph, Josephine is your namesake, can't you see that? Joseph and Josephine! Joseph and Josephine! Joseph and Josephine! Joseph is in love with Josephine. Joseph and Josephine are in love..."

I laughed so hard and almost cried, it was too good to be true. I told Cecilia to shut up but she wouldn't. Deep inside, I wanted her to continue chanting those names. It made Josephine exist as a relevant being in my life. Whenever Cecilia mentioned that name, Josephine ceased to be immaterial. She turned into real flesh and came to life. She was my Josephine. Josephine, the greatest love of my life.

Josephine. Josephine, my love. Josephine, my true love. Josephine, my one and only. My beloved Josephine. My lovely Josephine.

I was in love. I was in love with Josephine.

I learned that Josephine was fifteen years old. She was the last born daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Mwafulirwa. She was a Form 2 student at Livingstonia Girls' Secondary School. She was a very smart girl (head-wise and fashion-wise). She had no boyfriend and, as far as Cecilia was concerned, she was not looking for one.

"Not even a handsome and intelligent boy from Blantyre?" I asked Cecilia hopefully.

Cecilia smiled sadly and patted me on my shoulder. "You're not the first person from the city that has ever come to our village. Others have failed before you. Having boyfriends is not Josephine's number one priority. That girl has big brains. She wants to become an engineer. Do you think she is going to waste her time with you? Why do you want her to be your girlfriend?"

"She is the most lovely and radiant person I have ever seen. I just want to know her better. I want her to be part of my life."

You can imagine what I did during those holidays to conquer Josephine's affection.

I wrote her fiery letters. I sent her little presents. I asked my cousin over and over again if she could bring Josephine to the house, even if it were for some mere precious seconds. I passed by the borehole several times a day, hoping that I would catch a glimpse of her silhouette as she fetched water several times a day. I rarely succeeded in my endeavours but when I did...God, it was one of the most satisfying feelings I have ever had. My heart felt warm for days on end and my headaches disappeared. I talked about her for days until Cecilia told me that it was about time I got over this girl.

"You barely know her," Cecilia told me one day. "She doesn't love you."

Was this true?

My cousins words hurt me.

Yet, the truth was stark clear. It was right there, in front of my eyes.

Josephine did not reply to my letters. She did not talk to me. She did not accept any of my presents. She did not smile back at me when I showered her with the warmth of my heart. Josephine rarely looked at me. I was insignificant in her eyes. I was a pure joke. I would never hold a special place in her heart. She would never reciprocate my love.

In the end, I finally accepted this truth, reluctantly. I decided to spend the rest of my holidays playing with my cousins in the bush and at the river. We hunted for mice. We swam. We made cars from fencing wire and we did mock orchestra bands. We went into the woods to fetch wild fruit that we shared with our

little cousins back home. We loved seeing their reactions as we gave them the bounty. They would be playing *ndado* and as soon as they saw us, they would shout “**FRUUUUIIIIT!**” and rush towards us to get their present. It was always a wonderful moment. We would then roast dry maize and groundnuts and eat them while we talked about our day. We played from sunrise to sunset. Our days were eventful and I was sad to leave all this behind when it was time to go back home. I hoped Josephine would come to say goodbye. She didn't. I was not surprised. I knew that she was resolute in her choices. Josephine. Josephine, my love.

I have yet to see Josephine again. I haven't forgotten her. Cecilia regularly gives me news about my love (Yes, my love, my Josephine, my one and only). She still wants to become an engineer. Her dream is to be selected to the Polytechnic University where she can pursue a Civil Engineering degree.

“Josephine has great plans for our village,” Cecilia wrote to me. “She wants none of this pointless suffering and hopelessness any more. She believes that when you really want something you can have it. No situation, however desperate it might appear, is written in stone. Things change and for the better, when we want them to, when we all want them to. Where there is a will, there is way. Josephine has a strong will.”

I will always love Josephine. She will always have a special place in my heart. I want her to be the mother of my children. I want my children to call her Josephine ‘Mum’. One day they will, surely.

People cannot understand why I love a girl who does not even want to look at me. They say that I am infatuated with her. Some even say that she put a spell on me. They say that I have changed quite a lot since I came back from the village. I pay a lot more attention to my studies. I help my parents at home. I am more respectful towards elders. It is true that I now think more about my future. I want to live with purpose. I am no longer drifting in this world like I used to. I have specific goals and dreams.

I want to live a good life. I hope I can live this good life with Josephine.

I can picture us walking and working in Bolero in ten years' time, fifteen years' time, twenty years time... Together we will work at transforming Bolero, my home village. I swear that Bolero will have functional electricity, running water, good sanitation facilities, excellent schools and magnificent roads in my lifetime.

Bolero, our home village, will nurture our love. Josephine and I will take care of Bolero in return. I cannot wait for this to happen. I hope I could talk about all this with Josephine. I worry not though. Time will come. Time will come when I can talk and do all these things with Josephine.

I know I will always love this girl.

She is my true love.

We are a match made in heaven

I love Josephine. I really do.

I miss Josephine. I just cannot stand it.

Josephine, my love. I cherish you. I love you. I adore you.

You will always, always have a special place in my heart!



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