

Tafara Catfish

Tafara is the kind of girl you want. You've barely started talking, and you imagine both of you laying down ass bare on a beach in Sochi. It will be perfect- you watching the black sea that is not even black, and her swimming in it. She is stepping out of the water in a green bikini. She strikes you like the kind of girl to wear a green bikini. You won't notice anything else, not the water in a little fit of rage, not the little kids with floaters on their arms running around, not the old couple laying under the sun face down for hours now, skin already getting more than a tan. It will be just her running towards you straight out of the water in a green bikini with your Kappa shades on, and the thought of your happiness together will make you happy. Perhaps it is her name, the combination and the weirdness of it all draws you to her. Like a name out of a NoViolet's novel, you once joked that if you ever get married, it will be you to change the last name because it will be a great conversation starter. Or it is her legs, the way they align with her body, a little bracket at the waist, then elegant long legs dark brown like the Mansonia. You've caught yourself going back over and over to the highlights on her Instagram. The one you revisit the most, she is wearing a purple gown with a slit that reveals her legs gently. You dream about running your hands tenderly on those legs like a boat sailing gently across the Niger. It could be her face, the architecture of it with those slightly bulgy eyes that beckon on you, thick black eyebrows, and a small smile entrenched on her lips, grinning whether she spoke or not. Everything seemed perfect, and you imagine she will always be that way – beautiful no matter what happened.

You want to tell her how much you want her and that this want is eating you inside, but you don't want to be all in her face because

that might push her away. You want to take it easy, crawl up gently under her skin until you are everywhere, and she can't get rid of you. It is never good to rush things like this anyway. *Surulere*. You are considering asking her on a wine date because you are not good with food. You will probably be staring at the menu all day, wondering what a small-town boy like you knows about fucking Rigatoni Alla Carbonara. But with wine, it is easier and will break the ice between you both. You can skim through a wine menu easily; anyone with about 10% alcohol will get you both intoxicated within half an hour. You will settle for one from South Africa to feel closer to the motherland. She seems like a wine girl; you pause to imagine a glass between her two fingers, flicking it gently and laughing at your jokes. You've got a lot of them anyway. She will open to you gently, shedding her layers, and you will listen. You will listen and ask all the questions you're supposed to ask. The wine will make you both vulnerable, and you will tell each other about your likes and dislikes, movies you adore, and songs you can't live without. You should go to an art gallery afterward. There is an exhibition at the HSE art gallery. It seems cool, not filled with dead artists. Maybe you will go to the gallery before the wine because, unlike you, she doesn't want to be drunk at noon in a gallery.

You first meet Tafara at a party you were not supposed to be at. Those kinds of parties you know nothing about, but you have a friend who does, so you go along with him. It was some girls' birthday party. Your roommate and friend, Idris, is a coursemate to the girl's boyfriend. You don't want to go, but he kept on.

"Babes go yapa there you never jam these ones before "he said. You don't budge. He kept going about the girls, jogging your memory about some good party a year ago and another party where you met some girl from Botswana, from Sierra Leone, but you are

barely listening. It wasn't until he shifted to weed, a last resort to convince you, that he began to make sense. You've not smoked some in a while and see it will be a foolish decision to even say no to free weed.

It is March, and every day, it keeps snowing. Someday, it snows so much, and as the inches of snow keep increasing as the snow keeps covering the earth, you fear there will ultimately be a snowpocalypse. The snow will swallow everything, your 17-floor apartment building will be buried under it quickly. Nobody will survive it, not you, not the kids throwing snowballs at each other that you always watch from your corner wishing simple things like that make you happy, not your moustached engineering drawing professor that you detest so much. These thoughts bring you some sort of melancholic satisfaction. You dress warmly because you don't have a choice. Idris is at the door, already swearing you will pay for the extra time you've kept the taxi. You hurry to tie your shoelaces, and on a last thought, you grab the Kappa shades you bought the summer before. The party was at a dacha right out of town by the bank of the frozen Kazanka. In the summer, there used to be life on the river boats driving across, people drinking by the bank, loud music blaring from speakers, folks playing volleyball on the sand, and children and adults of all sexes and races swimming in the river. There is nothing now.

The time you arrive is that time of the night when you can't tell if the party is in full swing or if it has just started. It is that time when people have started drinking, but they have not had enough to get shit started. Either way, it won't take long to find warmth; you will forget about the snowpocalypse and the frozen river and the igloo the winter builds in your heart melts away. It is like that convention in Addis Ababa down here, everyone conversing in their colonizers'

tongues. Looking around, you can quickly put names to some faces before you go around to shake hands –In one corner, there is the tall light skin Mozambican named Osvaldo who always got into some fight with his girl whose name you don't recall or ever bother to know. They are all good now, holding whiskey glasses and dancing closely to some song with Portuguese or Spanish lyrics. Close to the staircase, there is the Somalian guy, Abdul, who gave you haircuts in the dormitory bathroom back in the first year. He is laughing loudly at some joke. All around him are Arabic speakers, all laughing. One more glance across the room, you lock eyes with the Zambian girl you once took on a movie date. However, it didn't materialise into anything, probably because you took her to a Russian movie without any subtitles. It was so boring that there was nothing to talk about afterward. You quickly take your eyes off, in a bid to reduce the awkwardness, but the deed is already done. On the table were bottles of champagne, vodka, which you must know was abundant and cheap in Kazan, two fine-cut cognacs, Heineken, Bud, Bud lights, and all other cheap beers you can think of. In the heat of the party, you will get to know that the birthday girl is on a dare to drink shots, numbering her new age. Last you recall, she was on number eight and still a long way to twenty-one.

Down the staircase in the sauna, you will find your tribe, the ones you spent all lockdown together in an apartment bingeing euphoria though now you can't retell a single episode because you were constantly high, inviting anyone mostly females who cared to honour your invites and drinking every beer known to mankind from Belgian pale ales, Mexican coronas to your favourite German-style Dunkel's. Then you played a little game called beer tourism, where you all drank beer and talked about the places you'd visit if you ever visited the country it originated. If you made it to Germany, the land of Dunkels, you have to go to all the underground clubs in Berlin unlike

most of your tribe who had rather visit the holocaust memorial. They are high now and passing a joint, which you promptly request.

Tebogo, the Botswanan, your favourite is giggly to see you. He shook your hands four times, and now he won't release it from his grip. He is smiling at you simultaneously, which warms your heart so much that you smile in return. You missed his company. In no time, your head is in the clouds, and your feet are on the dancefloor, singing along whatever way the lyrics come out. When Jerusalema comes on, you are tugging at someone's waist, dancing with everyone in a circle. That is when someone takes your kappa sunshades off in a jiffy, you notice, but you are having so much fun you don't bother to react.

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Good parties like this rarely come to a natural end. Something happens, and it is just the duality of life in play. Some bad to balance the good and vice versa. Something happens, and it is Idris in some ruckus. In scenarios like this, you would have preferred to be a spectator laughing at those involved with friends, but it is Idris, so you step in. He is being restrained, screaming at a guy who is held back, too. He curses in Yoruba, Pidgin English, Queens English, and occasionally some Russian for balance. The story goes he was talking to this girl who is nowhere in sight, and she hands him a cola bottle. As he was about to down it, girl's boyfriend appeared out of nowhere grabbed the bottle off his hand, spilling the entire content on the floor right in his front, splashing on him. You don't know how, but you succeeded in placating him. You remind him that the idiot isn't worth his wrath, and it is better if you both return home. You are waiting for the taxi outside, Idris is still murmuring about the guy calling him a dick and what else, and you agree because at least you don't have to separate a fight anymore. Suddenly, you remember the

sunshades and run back inside, scanning faces for a Kappa sunshade with green rims. You find her sitting on a staircase, head on her lap, drunk. You tap her, as she brings her head up in response, that is when it happens. It is like a scene from a movie where the actor collides with the actress in a corridor and drops the books on her hands. The actor proceeds to gather the fallen books, and as he is about to hand them over, he is struck. Many scenes in movies don't depict real life, but with this, the director is right: men get struck by beauty. Her beauty left you with no choice but to get acquainted. You asked for her name, and she responded formally, like it was some sort of interview.

"My name is Tafara Catfish" she responded with that permanent smile, uncurling her lips.

The Japanese call it "koi no yukan"- the premonition of love. The feeling you've found someone that you inevitably become lovers. All you had to do was stretch your hands a little; voila, you are lovers. Catfish was from Zimbabwe; she loves to listen to SZA and has seafood allergies. You will know about all these over texts on Instagram. Her name, a colonial relic, a confluence of two worlds forced to meet, was the first thing you bonded on. You tell her you find her last name funny, and she replies that it could have been worse; I've got friends named Evidence, even Trouble. In Shona, names are meant to tell a story, to be a timeline of one's birth. Translated into English, they don't tell the same story, the language doesn't hold the same weight. More than a lot is lost in translation, she tells you. She is studying to become a dentist at the big university but would instead be a chef if she had her way. You both love Frank Ocean; her favorite track is Novocane, and yours is In My Room. You wonder what else you have in common. Does she have a restless soul? Like you, does she bite her nails when nervous? One night, you have a dream. You are walking hand in hand by the Kazanka, now unfrozen. You tell her you've always been tempted to swim in it, but

fear won't let you. She took her clothes off, sporting a green bikini underneath, and dived in. You plunged after into her hands, and then you woke up. The next day, you ask whether she have any plans for the weekend and if she will like to go to a listening room with you. You don't call it a date because that may sound too forward, and you want to take things slow. Your heart was in your mouth waiting for a reply, and when she replied yes, yes, I would love to. You almost let out a scream.

You never buy flowers; you don't understand people who do. You can't stand with a flower in public-- the enormity of your desire out in the open for every passer-by to see disgusts you. But on the D-day, you Googled about flowers for over an hour. "Flowers for first date Reddit " you typed on the search bar. Though you want to take it slow, it will be good to convey your intention. There were many suggestions, and after a long tussle with yourself, you settled on two roses. You make a reservation at the listening room in the heart of Kazan on Pushkin Street, which housed almost all the bars and restaurants. You've been obsessed with listening rooms since you watched that VICE documentary about them in Tokyo. Fortunately, one opened some months back in Kazan. You've been there once. Once, when you wanted to be away from everyone. It was heaven in the form of a tiny basement. They only played vinyl, and the night you were there, you heard Manu Dibango, Hugh Masekela, Tony Allen, songs you thought you would never hear here. Songs that took you back home. You loved it there, she probably will, you thought. You go to the salon and scrape off the afro on your head that you

haven't touched all winter. In the shower, you daydream about the dance you will share under the lights with Steve Monite's Only You playing; you will pull her closer and sing to her. It will come from your heart because you really mean it. Only her can put out this wildfire burning in your heart. You are in the middle of picking clothes weighing the perfect one for this occasion when the texts come in. It reads simply, "I can't make it today. I am sorry ". You never see her again.