

MY LOVER'S CHARM

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Masoyina. My love.

It is me, Khadijah.

Can you hear me?

You look at me, your eyes squinting to recognize the woman standing above you.

Slowly, you remove your hand from my grip and in confusion, you ask,

“Who are you?”

It was in that moment that I knew my lover became the thing I feared the most; a stranger.

TWO WEEKS EARLIER...

“Khadijah.”

“Khadijah.”

“Khadijah.”

Hajiya Zainabu called me three times on the day I met you, my lover.

“Ma'an?” I answered her, snapping myself back to reality.

“You are not paying attention. Listen very carefully. This is the most important part.” She warned me as we sat in the middle of her corner shop.

Hajiya Zainabu was my stepmother and also a *kayan mata* seller. Earlier today, I told her about a man I fell in love with— you, alhaji Magaji.

You just moved into our village from the city with your wife and two children. That first day you walked into my stall in the market, I knew there was something special about you.

You came in to buy *jellabiya* gown for your beautiful wife for her birthday.

I sold the finest piece to you and told you how lucky your wife was to find a man whose eyes glistened at the thought of her happiness.

You replied that you were a lover boy and that any woman would be lucky to be with you. In that moment, I felt something in me. A desire. For your eyes to glisten at the thought of my happiness.

And so, I told hajiya Zainabu that I had found a man my heart sang for. Without hesitation, she took me to her secret place to show me how to win your heart.

They say sex and food was the way to a man's heart. But hajiya Zainabu showed me something more powerful than that.

Something more eternal.

She lifted it up to my face.

The enchanted waist beads.

In her palms, were three sparkling colored waist beads.

Red, blue and white.

Passion, devotion and purity.

She poured a little favour oil over them and prayed over the waist beads before placing them into my palms. Then she said to me,

“Do not, in any circumstances, let the sun shine on one bead. It is meant to stay hidden.” Hajiya warned me. “The only light permitted to see its beauty is the moon. And only then should you lie with your lover.”

Gaskiya. I nodded in understanding, admiring the beauty of the glistening beads on my palm.

“Never make love during the day, only at night. For the sweetness of your lover's touch is only felt in darkness.” She touched my hair, caressing me like she was you- my lover.

Oh, the sweetness of a lover's touch. My spirit could feel it before my body could.

“One last thing.” Hajiya whispered into my ear, “These beads do not just win a man's heart, they win his entire existence. Body. Mind. And soul.”

I smiled.

Your entire existence, *masoyina*, is now mine.

Alongside the waist beads, hajiya gave me vagina tightener and sweetener to enhance our nightly passions.

It didn't take up to three days for you to return to my shop with your wife. She fell in love with the first *jellabiya* you bought and needed more. Demanding, she was. I watched the way she took her time to pick out her best three and how patient you were.

There was a groaning in my stomach. The sound of envy.

But no worries, because all I needed to do was...

“Sorry.” You apologized swiftly as you gripped my waist, stopping me from falling to the ground next to you.

You looked into my eyes, I was lost in yours.

And that was all it took for you to belong to me.

Your lips began to twitch into a curve before you remembered that your wife was right beside us. You quickly released your grip from mine, slightly letting your fingers run through the waist beads under my wrapper.

As you walked out of my stall holding your wife’s hand, you turned around to give me one last glance before leaving the market. I could see it in your eyes. Your burning desires.

I waited for you that night. I sat atop the table in my stall, watching the stars sparkle in the night sky through the opened door.

You stepped into the stall, blocking the stars from my sight. Your eyes were the only stars left to see.

You shut the door behind you, your eyes never escaping from mine.

As you moved close to my body, I let out a sharp breath, not believing this was really happening. Hajiya Zainabu, *na gode* (thank you)!

You touched my hair, caressing it gently like it was a delicate flower. I became lost in your touch. You brought down your fingers to my lips, slightly touching the base before sliding two fingers into my mouth. You gently thrust them back and forth without taking your eyes off mine.

You showed me what you could do to this firewood called my body. You showed me that you were a man who didn’t have sex but made love.

The rest of night was a constant cycle of moaning and screaming and sweating and our bodies dancing to the rhythm of our passion. The moon watched us all night. She became so jealous she began to burn into sunrise.

At the rise of dawn, you asked me,

“What is your name?”

“Khadijah.”

“*Masoyiyata* (my love).” You whispered, “That is the only name my lips can whisper.”

“Call me what you want,” I nibbled your bottom lips, “*Masoyina*.”

The night cries became our anthem. Time seemed to stop when we were on each other's skins. Then it began to move again when you left my shop.

Your entire existence became mine, and my entire existence became yours. Day and night, I imagined our worlds together, what it would be like.

I wanted to be your second wife. The new wife you cherished the most. The wife that reminded you of your youth.

Finally, one blissful evening, I poured out my heart to you.

"*Masoyina*, let me be your wife."

Your body froze at the mention of the last word. Your eyes darkened and the corner of your lips curved downwards.

"Come again?" You spoke.

"I want to marry you. Let us be together forever"

There was a slap.

On my mouth.

In shock, I held onto my mouth and stared at you in disbelief. What just happened? Did my lover just...

"Shut up! Don't you ever mention such a disgusting thing again. You, *karuwa* (prostitute), be my wife?" He laughed, "*Allah kiyaye* (God forbid)!"

Before I could say anything, you spat on me and walked away from my shop with your kaftan shirt hanging over your shoulders.

The waist beads' love charm... did it suddenly stop? Did hajiya Zainabu put an expiry date on them?

The next day after work, I was about closing my shop and running to meet hajiya for explanations when suddenly, you were standing in front of my shop door with your hands behind you.

I took a step back, afraid of what you might do next. Cut my mouth?

You walked inside, slowly. What you did next came as a surprise. You knelt down in front of me, remorse written all over face.

"*Masoyiyata*." You began to cry as you kissed in between my wrapper, "I am sorry. I am so sorry."

You apologized profusely about last night, not letting me go. You kept kissing the spot in between my legs, knowing that was my favourite place to be kissed.

I wanted to push you away but I couldn't resist your touch. I wanted more.

Like you could read my mind, you started bringing out little pieces of paper that you hid behind your back and began putting them underneath my pant.

I looked at the papers. Money.

You kept piling more and more cash into my underwear till there was no space for more.

"These are all yours, *masoyiyata*." You pecked my laps, "Lai lai, I will never slap you again."

Maybe the love charm never stopped working. Maybe it was just me. Maybe it was my fault for bringing up marriage too soon.

We never spoke about that night again. You never said anything about marriage. We continued making love, more passionately this time.

You said I was your lover for eternity.

"Then why don't you marry me?" I asked again when you said those words.

You pushed me away and cursed under your breath, "Didn't I warn you never to bring up marriage again?!"

"If you want us to be forever, then you must marry me!"

"Are you saying you're going to leave me if I don't?" Your eyes darkened. I could see your hands quivering already.

"Yes!"

"You say?"

"I said I will leave you if you don't marry-"

You slapped me. Again.

Not one time. Or two. Or three. You slapped me over and over again till your slaps turned into punches.

I was helpless over your huge frame. Even when I screamed for help, no one came to my rescue. It was midnight and the market was empty, after all they were familiar with my horny screams from previous nights.

"It is you and I for eternity." You said lastly before leaving my shop.

You left that night with blood stains on your fists. My blood.

You did not kill me. But you damaged me to the point that I could not look in the mirror.

You came back the next day. I had been in the same place you left me since last night, curled up in a dark corner with tears in my eyes.

You had been so violent; I began to fear your touch. When you came close to me, my body shuddered in fear.

Did you come to caress my cheeks, or did you come to slap them?

You begged for forgiveness and made love to me again. But my body did not understand if it was loving this time, or something else.

When you choked me in bed, did you want to seduce me or did you want to kill me? I would never know. Because now, my body couldn't tell the difference.

The damage you had done to my spirit became unfixable. I could not tell which was love and which was hate. I accepted both your caress and your punches as a sign of love. *Your* love.

It was your way of venting to me. Your mouth couldn't express yourself, so your hands did. I thought.

After you were done for the night, I realized one thing. My lover's touch would never be the same again. Your new touch... felt like thorns piercing my skin.

"*Masoyina!*" I shouted at you before your foot stepped outside my shop. You turned around to look at me.

"This will be the last time you will ever touch me again." I warned. Be it the touch that ignited a passionate fire in me, or the deadly beast in you. I didn't care.

Your face darkened and you walked towards me. Whether you were trying to caress me or beat me up, I would never know. Because...

I pulled out the three waist beads out of my waist, causing the tiny beads to splatter on the floor.

Suddenly, you fell to the ground before you could reach me. Your head bouncing against the grains of beads scattered on the floor.

I didn't know what happened, but I began to panic. What did I just do? Why did you fall so sudden? Was the broken jazz going to kill you?

"*Masoyina!*" I shook your body, "*Masoyina!*"

Soon, you began to groan in pain and hold your hands to your aching head.

"*Masoyina!*"

You groaned again, “Who is that shouting?”

“It is me, Khadijah.” I asked in worry, “Can you hear me?”

You looked at me, your eyes squinting to recognize the woman standing above you.

Slowly, you removed your hand from my grip and in confusion, you asked,

“Who are you?”

Time stopped once again. This time, to get me back to my senses.

“Who are you? And what are you doing in my shop?” I asked back in pretence, “You suddenly collapsed, alhaji.”

“I did?” You asked in confusion, getting back to your feet.

You looked around in confusion, not recognizing where you were. You looked at me, half naked as my wrapper covered my upper body.

“Sorry to disturb your sleep, hajiya. You can go back to sleep.” You apologized before drifting away from my shop.

And just like that, my lover was no longer mine. He was a stranger.

The following morning, I visited hajiya Zainabu. She was not only shocked to see the damage you, alhaji Magaji, had done to my face, but to also see pieces of the broken waist beads in a nylon bag.

I told her everything. That despite the love you had for me, you still beat me up.

She held my face in pity and apologized, “*Sannu*. I should have warned you. The love charm has its limits. It cannot change a man from his nature. If an abuser, always an abuser. If a liar, always a liar.”

“How was I supposed to know?” I bawled in front of her.

“We never know. We never know, my dear.”

Later that evening, I received one last customer as I was about to close my shop for the day.

“Hajiya, sorry oh! Shop don close for—”

My tongue froze at the sight of my last customer. It was your wife.

She looked unfazed as she walked towards my side.

“I came to return these.” She said, dropping a nylon bag of all four *jellabiya* gowns you bought for her from me.

If it was any other customer, I would have argued that we did not do refund.

“Do you have any problem with them, ma?” I asked her.

“Yes. It smells of whore.”

She knew. She knew about you and me.

She smiled staring at my bruised face, “I am the apple of my husband’s eye and no woman can take my place. Never.”

She threw the nylon bag at me, “One woman power pass another woman power.”

I did not understand what she meant until she turned around to walk out of my shop. She lifted the hem of her long hijab to step out even though there were no stairs to climb.

But as my eyes looked to the ground, I saw something green glisten around your wife’s right ankle.

A beaded leg chain.

No.

An enchanted beaded leg chain.

Chai.

Na me mess up.