

“STEADY ROCKING”

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Poems:



BIG GIRL STATUS

There are days I often longed for,

But none like today;

Nothing comes close to this joy;

Or the happiness I feel;

I often remembered the early mornings;

And bright evenings;

When mom would walk me to school;

And wait for me at the school gate when school was over;

This was love;

This is how she showed me she cared;

This was how she reminded me;

That I was her little baby;

And today;

Comes the day;

I can finally walk myself to school;

Me and my friends, like the big girls we are;

I often wondered how it felt;
Always hoped that this new milestone;
Would make them understand;
That I was growing into a big girl;

Soon enough;
The day will come,
When I too, will be able to board matatus on my own;
Be able to move unsupervised;

There's a nice pretty stage near our school gate;
Where big girls move around the city unchecked;
And I often long to be like them;
But today; today we celebrate this beautiful milestone.



WE ONCE WALKED

There are those who claim,

Our men hate us;

But it's not just a claim,

When you see how women are treated in bus stages all over this city;

We are harassed simply for having bodies;

Simply for dressing how we like;

And on extreme cases stripped naked for all to see;

But there are those who love us, and fight for us;

On mornings like these;

Seeing women like her;

Surrounded like vultures on a stage;

I'm reminded of what it feels like; what it felt like;

I remember owning my first car;

Driving it off the yard;

It wasn't new,

But to me it was,

It gave me the kind of empowerment that many women lack;

It reminded me that I am beautiful;

And deserve to feel safe,

It reminded me that I am human too;

I offer her a lift to where she's going;

I see the gratitude in her eyes;

She feels safe,

In a way she is reminded that women are each other's keepers;

"Midnight Train" from Sauti Sol's new album has just come on;

I turn the radio volume up;

This is one of those mornings;

I know it will be a good day;

We are jamming like soul sisters;

We understand something that words can't explain;

We are stuck in traffic; but we love it; this is it;

Right beside my car; is a matatu with "Midnight Train's" cover art on the side;

It's one of those mornings that were meant to be.



CITY OF DREAMS

Growing up in this city,
Often felt momentous;
Like everything was constantly moving to this one important moment in time;
That the struggles we go through;
Are part of the beauty of the journey we are on;

Matatus represent our culture;
They hold dear what we love and cherish;
Like murals, that never stop moving;
Every corner, every turn; has something new to offer;
Our culture is embedded in the stories they tell;

The loud sounds of this city keep it alive;
From the hooting of cars stuck in traffic;
To the booming of sound from matatus;
They represent who we are;
And it is how we become, custodians of our time;

Jobs in this city are scarce;
It's why we hustle through early mornings and late nights;
Trying to etch a living;
Moving through bright lights;
And matatu stages that are always full of people on the move;

And today morning is no different;
I'm worried about time;
Worried about the traffic that might make me late for my interview;
But somehow I still have hope;
Somehow, things always fall into place in this city;

"Mi Siwezi" by Kahush has just come on,
And like clockwork,
The driver turns up the volume;
This is the jam to keep your spirits up;
The loud music and the lyrics from the song remind me not to stop, not to ever stop;

We've barely stopped at the Railways stage;
And I'm already out of the matatu;
Joining the large crowd of people chasing their dreams;
Making opportunities out of nothing;
That's why we call Nairobi, the City of Dreams.



A PLACE WE'VE CALLED HOME

These young men,

Always flying out of Matatus that have barely stopped;

You wonder where they are running to;

I wonder what's become of this city, everyone is always in a hurry;

I remember the first time I came;

Right after Independence;

We had big dreams and hopes back then;

Not that we don't; but I'm an old man now;

A lot of these big buses you see today;

Full of color and tattoos;

You wonder why anyone would do that to such a beautiful bus;

I would never let my boss do that to this bus of mine;

When I was younger;

I remember doing cross country trips;

I loved the life back then;

Nights spent making stops in different towns, it was the life;

But when the wife became pregnant;
I had to adjust, settled for this, and I love it;
30 years and still going strong;
Fed, clothed and schooled my kids right here;

I've watched this city become everything it is;
Watched buildings come and go;
Might as well say I'm a living museum you know;
Too bad they still let these reckless *nduthis* enter the CBD.



DREAMS COME TRUE

There are few days I've aspired to live;

And today is the hallmark;

I'm making my mark in this city;

Finally having a say;

The long nights spent in the office;

The mornings spent rushing to meetings;

The eye bags built on countless cups of coffee;

It all still feels like a dream;

My parents would be proud;

Their son made something of his life;

His company is going public;

Look at that, we did it;

I remember a time when I despised these motorbikes;

Felt like CEOs were too high up to ride on them;

But my business has been built on this, if I can say;

Countless are the times I almost got late for meetings but these *nduthis* came through;

This last time;

How poetic would it be;

To ride to the NSE to ring the bell;

Aboard one;

The notification on the app informs me the rider has just arrived;

Few seconds later, I get a call from him to inform me where he is;

“Haiya si wewe ni ule CEO kampuni yake inaenda public?”

“Eeh, ni mimi...” I answer while putting on my helmet while sitting at the back of his motorbike.



BECOMING

Looking back,
I've done well for myself;
From the little girl afraid of the city,
But determined to have a say;
To becoming the first female CEO of the NSE,

At times it all feels like a dream;
And I often wait for someone to pinch me,
To remind me that maybe I'm fast asleep,
And no glass ceilings have been broken;
At least not yet;

But we moved through it all,
Understood what it meant and what it took;
And dedicated our lives to it;
And in a way, I'm grateful for all I've been through;
Because it's made me into who I am;

I'm meeting my girls for lunch;

It's how we've always celebrated the important moments in life;

And today brought cause for celebration;

I witnessed my first IPO as CEO;

And nothing brings more joy than to be with the ones who've always held it down;

I remember a younger me;

I would probably be rushing to my car;

Trying to move to the rhythm of this city's traffic;

Because taking a cab back then would have cost an arm and a leg;

And now, understanding that;

I'm grateful for the cab hailing apps that have crowded the market;

They've made good on competition;

And created so much ease;

That was previously unheard of;

And maybe now,

A girl can hope,

That I'll still be around,

When one of those companies goes public;

As a hallmark to the impact they've had on our transport system,

I'm jolted back to the present by my PA;

She's confirming the plane tickets for the girls trip this weekend to the Coast;

And informing me, that my cab has just arrived;

As I walk out, I reminisce on our first girls trip on the SGR.



MY GIRLS AND I

We've just arrived at the terminal;

We are all a bit sweaty;

And frankly unfit;

But oh well, the gym is a rumor we haven't heard in a while;

We can't wait to get to Coast;

We've all been waiting for this moment;

We all frankly needed a break;

And what better way than to spend it together;

The SGR has been some of the gems we can claim to have as a country;

And of course better than the old railway lines that would take forever;

Plus the view; oh the views along the way;

And the beautiful terminals that are architectural marvels;

I remember stories from my parents;

Traveling in the old trains to different parts of the country;

Exploring young love;

Not knowing that, that love would be christened by my siblings and I;

Eventually when we are all married with kids;
My girls and I;
Will pass down similar stories to our children;
Remind them of this bond and this feeling of family among friends;

We are finally seated in our seats;
Our bags safely tucked away;
Traveling and drinking games laid out;
And the train's engine has come alive;

As we set off;
This feeling, reminds me of the album "Midnight Train,"
Only that it's the late afternoon,
And we'll have the evening sun to experience the views along the way;

After so long;
Here we are;
Our first girls trip in a while;
We are about to throw it down in Mombasa.



UNFINISHED BUSINESS

We've just arrived in Coast;

I honestly would have loved to see the views along the way;

But my sleepy head that was awake, all night, last night, couldn't keep awake;

But last night was heavy and worth it;

It's been a while since I was here;

Frankly three years;

And I can't wait to start writing poems;

I needed a hiatus from everything and what better way than to lock myself up in Coast;

There was this one poem that I never quite finished;

It was about Fort Jesus, just at the edge of Old Town;

I remember reflecting on the history and the significance it held;

But the words eluded me;

But here I am;

As if I was coming home;

Coming to finish this one piece;

That still held so much of my unfinished business;

It's difficult,

Chasing a poem,

That constantly eludes you;

That dares you to escape in order to be found;

I finally spot a Tuk Tuk at the edge of the Mombasa SGR terminal;

I travel light when I'm on trips like this,

So there's not much to carry;

I whip out my notebook ready to start writing, and head over to him;

If there's anything that I love about the Tuk Tuks in Coast;

Is that you don't have to be crowded into one, they can carry you as one;

Before I know it, we've set out for Fort Jesus;

The evening sun and steady breeze is welcome after the long train ride;

This is it,

My final piece;

Going back to basics;

To finish the one poem that I left hanging all those years ago.