

January 1, 1971

Please see postscript before you read this letter.

My dear Nomvula,

Re roba matsoho for you & John! Is it true? Can you two really do this to me, take such momentous decisions without even as much as giving me a hint? I must have missed heaps of meat & pudding at the engagement party. To your wedding I would have been accepted just as I am, without having to sport a frock coat, starched shirt & top hat. What is even more important to me, your wedding would have been one occasion in which I could have shined at last. I rehearse daily on a penny whistle; everyone around here calls it that though it cost R2.00. I'm still on the d.t.l.-stage but with more practice I could have tried Handel's Messiah on it on the great day.

You have guts in the proper sense of the term. Was it love, love of adventure or both that made you take such a gamble? There is no insurance house anywhere in the country that could secure you against such an obvious risk. On as hopeful & as ambitious as John is will most probably not allow the sweet pleasures of an ordered family life to interfere with his pattern of thoughts and doings. Besides, even at a distance, association with a Nomvula would tend to keep him on the ball most of the time. What do you expect the poor fellow to do when you are actually entrenched right inside his mansion, your ears on the ground and feeling the pulse as usual, now questioning this, condemning that & demanding action all along the line? He will run wild.

They tell the story of a woman (I believe she lives in your street) who has terrific reserves of will-power & initiative, & who made a deal as fatal & remarkably similar to the one you are now contemplating. The going was uphill right from the beginning. Hardly 4 months after the wedding bells had tolled, some hue & cry on the Reef forced her to live for a fortnight with the matron at Ameshoff St. *Yena nowakwakha* tight-roped for 48 months when their dreams of a well-organised domestic life abruptly ended. Hubby went & real chaos reigned in her soul & everything around her. She now lives like a swimmer in a rough sea, battered & tossed about by giant waves & treacherous currents. Is this the miserable life you now wish to lead?

I suspect you'll immediately retort by pointing out that on questions of this nature I ought to address myself not to your brains but to your breast, persuade not your head but your heart, for it is the latter that John has won; or are you the conqueror? If this be your retort then say I: Hallelujah! Genissimo!! Sermons on such matters, even from well-meaning friends, are out of place. What the heart feels may very often be the sole justification for what we do. I have known John since the forties & I regard him very highly. He is humane & generous & possesses a lively & sober mind. I sincerely believe in him you've found an ideal partner who will make life for you happy & enjoyable, & who will encourage you to sharpen the abilities that you undoubtedly possess. You've caught a big fish, little sister! Or are you going to prove me wrong once again by saying: *Buti*, I'm a modest person but I can't help thinking that John is a lucky fellow. It's him, not me, who has caught a big fish. I am the creation's rarest fish, the Coelacanth!

This is a duel to be fought between you two, I'll stay out of it. But I do wish you to know that: *Siqhwabizandla!* May the wedding day be bright & lovely & the night lit by a golden moon.

I should have liked to have written to both of you, but I deliberately avoided such a course. John & I are very close & I can speak frankly to him on personal matters without hurting him. If I spoke directly to him I might be tempted to ignore everything I have said here about delivering sermons. My letter might both be congratulations & reprimand, [as well as] a demand for explanations which might make conscience itch. But to you I can truly speak as I have done here, & this is how I should like things to be. Remember that both of you are very dear to me.

Thanks for the Xmas card sent in Dec. 69. That I never received it makes no difference whatsoever to my sense of gratitude. My only regret is that I was denied the opportunity of possessing a precious souvenir which would have made John & others shrink with jealousy. It

was most kind of you, Thoko, Rita, Miriam & our sister to think of me. Give them my fondest regards. Have you seen our sister lately? I'm worried over her. I have watched all kinds of storms break loose upon her. The harm occasioned by the ceaseless bombardment to which she has been subjected over a lengthy period is shown by the decline in her health. But it gives me some pleasure to notice that she is taking things well. Give her all my love.

You are probably in touch with an old friend I never forget, Benjy. I have wanted to write to him but on every occasion I have hesitated for reasons you would readily appreciate. He is brilliant & fearless, the type of man who must rise to the top of his profession. His dare-devilry reminds me of another friend for whom I had great admiration, Henry Nxumalo, another go-getter. Give him my greetings.

Do you ever hear of Cecil? I once wrote to him but he was already settled in New York when my letter reached the Rand. I'm sorry he had to leave because he played a special role which made him very valuable indeed. In the important media he controlled, he stressed those issues that keep us together as a community. In his office & home he kept a dialogue with those who repeatedly found themselves in disagreement on vital questions & he used his resources to narrow the gaps & to caution against separatism.

Recently I read a stimulating contribution by Lewis Nkosi on cultural problems & I was happy to note that he is still magnificent. My thoughts immediately went back to the mid-fifties, to other friends in the same profession – the late Can Themba, Todd Matshikiza & Nat Nakasa, to Bloke Modisane, Benson Dyantyi, Robert Resha, Arthur Leslie Sehume, Arthur Maimane, Simon Mogapi, Bob Gosani, Harry Mashabalala, Casey Motsisi, Ronnie Manyosi, Layton Plata, Doc Bikitsha, Mayekiso & Ikaneng, all of whom we miss.

Many of them are top chaps & compare very well with their counterparts across the colour line – Ruth First, Stanley Uys, Brian Bunting, Margaret Smith, Charles Bloomberg & others. Needless to say, I did not agree with everything they said, but I patiently listened to them because they often spoke a language I well understood & drew attention to concrete problems. I hope they still try to uphold the high standards. What new faces are there? How is Owen? I have seen a couple of your manuscripts. You'll not feel offended if I tell you that I was highly impressed. One or two lines caused me concern, but my confidence in you helps me to hope that you would certainly be able to give me an explanation which I could accept. *Re roba matsoho*. With love.

Very sincerely,
Buti Nel

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Postscript: This letter will amuse you. I received information that you were engaged to one of my great friends, hence this note. Though Zami corrected the error, I let it go as originally drafted.