

The Tourists

Jibbe Willems

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KEES
DENISE
NTANDO

Two Dutch tourists, a kind of happily married couple, are on holiday in South Africa. It's their first time on the continent and they've just arrived two days ago, so they're still adjusting. Kees is the husband, he's 45 years old and all red and sweaty from the heat. His wife, Denise, is in her late thirties (or early forties, but no-one needs to know). Her parents come from the former Dutch colony Suriname, but she was born and raised in The Netherlands and she has little to no knowledge of her Surinamese heritage. They're taking a tour through a small township, guided by the proud and serious Ntando. He is trying to educate these two Dutch people about South Africa and its history, though he doesn't seem to get through to them.

KEES Man it's hot.

DENISE Isn't this a dangerous place?

NTANDO No, you've got nothing to worry about.

KEES Except for dehydration maybe.

DENISE I thought townships were dangerous.

KEES And sunburns.

NTANDO Some are, but this is a real friendly place.

DENISE If you say so...

NTANDO As long as you are with me, nothing bad will happen to you.

DENISE That's good to know. Right, Kees?

Kees isn't paying attention, he is taking pictures with his phone.

DENISE What are you doing?

KEES What?

DENISE You didn't just take a picture of that poor kid, did you?

KEES Why not?

DENISE Because it's not right, that's why. *(to Ntando)* It's not right, right?

NTANDO I am sure nobody minds when you take pictures, as long as you treat them with respect.

KEES You see.

NTANDO Now, I'll tell you something about the history of this place.

KEES This heat, it isn't normal.

NTANDO When the people of this township were---(*Denise interrupts him*)

DENISE It's just not right.

KEES Come on.

DENISE We've got principles, don't we?

KEES We're on holiday.

DENISE Principles never take a holiday.

KEES They should. You should be able to shed your principles every seven years or so. Like snakes shed their skin. And then get a new set of principles. A more comfortable one. With a little more space. So you don't have to stagger round with that strict set of principles you've contracted so many years ago. That would make everything a little easier.

DENISE I'm not a snake!

KEES I'm sorry dear.

NTANDO So, as I was saying--- (*Denise interrupts him*)

DENISE And anyway, principles aren't supposed to be easy.

KEES Nothing with you is supposed to be easy.

DENISE Did you really say that? Did he really say that?

NTANDO (*tries again*) When the people were forced to--- (*Denise interrupts him*)

DENISE You can't insult me like that.

KEES I am sorry, the heat is making me say stupid things. We'd better go back to the hotel. If that's ok, Ntando. (*he is genuinely trying to pronounce his name correctly, but he is saying it wrong*)

NTANDO (*correcting him*) Ntando.

KEES Sorry.

DENISE Are you really going to ruin this for me?

KEES Please... I'm turning into a lobster.

DENISE This is my first time in Africa...

KEES Even my sweat is sweating.

DENISE I am feeling things that I didn't know I could feel.

KEES What kind of things?

DENISE I don't know. African things.

KEES Oh come on, you're just as Dutch as I am.

DENISE Why are you humiliating me?

KEES I am not---

DENISE *(to Ntando)* He is humiliating me. In front of you! First he embarrasses me by taking those pictures and now he is humiliating me in front of the guide.

KEES I am sorry.

DENISE You wouldn't treat a woman like that, would you, Ntando? *(she is really trying, but saying it wrong)*

NTANDO *(corrects her)* Ntando.

KEES It was just one picture!

DENISE One?

KEES One or two. Harmless.

DENISE It was disgusting! You were digitally bombing the poor girl.

KEES The poor girl? She was looking very happy.

DENISE Oh you're singing that song? They're so poor but oh so happy?

KEES I didn't say that!

NTANDO During the first years of apartheid-

DENISE You were digitally molesting that child.

KEES Come on.

DENISE It's colonialism all over again. Only this time it's digital.

KEES We've never colonised this country.

DENISE Oh haven't we?

KEES I don't think so, no. Have the Dutch ever colonised your country?

NTANDO Yes. You have.

KEES Really?

NTANDO You've been here since 1652. When Jan van Riebeeck started the first settlements. You've been here for centuries.

KEES Oh shit, of course, I'm sorry!

NTANDO Forget about it. It wasn't your fault.

KEES No I'm really sorry about that. I want to apologize on behalf of my ancestors, Ntando. (*he is saying it wrong*)

NTANDO (*correcting*) It's Ntando.

DENISE Yes. Ntando. (*she is saying it wrong*).

NTANDO (*correcting*) Ntando. My name is Ntando Maquthu.

KEES (*to Ntando*) Beautiful. (*to Denise*) It's those clicks and clacks, Denise, your tongue just doesn't fit around them.

DENISE And your tongue does?

KEES At least I'm making the effort. I'm trying to pick up a few Zulu words.

DENISE Oh, you're full of it. Zakkewasser.

KEES Honey, please...

NTANDO Zakkewasser?

KEES It's Dutch. It means washer of testicles.

NTANDO All right, let's move along.

KEES No, listen: (*tries to talk Zulu*) Banzana iLanga.

NTANDO Excuse me?

DENISE He always wants to learn something when we are on holiday.

KEES Banzana iLanga.

NTANDO I don't know what you're saying.

KEES You do speak Zulu, don't you?

NTANDO Yes.

DENISE When we went to Cuba he wanted to learn to dance the salsa.

KEES (*to Denise*) It's called *son* over there. (*to Ntando*) Ban-za-na i-Lang-a!

DENISE And when we got back from Shenzen he wanted to study Mandarin.

KEES (*to Denise*) That's still a good idea with the Chinese taking over the world and all. (*to Ntando*) banzana means good and iLanga means day. Banzana iLanga, goodday.

NTANDO Do you mean: usuku oluhle?

KEES Yes! (*tries to repeat it, fails*). Such a beautiful language. It's almost music.

DENISE And when we came back from Teheran he wanted to become an expert on Islam.

KEES That's still very relevant, before you know it the muslims take over.

DENISE I thought you said the Chinese were going to take over?

KEES It's one or the other. Either way we'd have to learn some scribbly handwriting.

DENISE Eikel.

NTANDO Eikel?

KEES That's the tip of a dick. And I don't like being called the tip of a dick, Denise, especially in this heat. You're upsetting me. It's not right, is it, Ntando? (*He's pronouncing it wrong.*)

NTANDO (*corrects him*) Ntando.

DENISE You keep getting it wrong, Kees. You have to respect his name, right Ntando? (*she's saying it wrong*)

NTANDO (*corrects her*) Ntando.

DENISE Because with his name you respect his language. And with his language you respect his culture. It's important to me that he knows that we respect his culture.

KEES I do! I do respect your culture, Ntando!

NTANDO (*corrects him*) Ntando.

DENISE I'm getting real tired of you. But really tired. The more I see you, the more I want to fall asleep. To get away from you.

KEES All right, that's it. I want to head back. You're making me sad. Or maybe it's the heat. I don't know if I am sweating or crying.

DENISE Sure. Go back to the hotel. I'll just stay here. (*to Ntando*) I'm sure we'll have a great time.

KEES (*grinding his teeth*) No, it's okay, I'll finish the tour.

NTANDO All right, let's get on with it. When Steve Biko was a child, he used to...

DENISE Oh, the child, I keep thinking about the poor child...

KEES Oh please...

DENISE That misery... it just... chills my soul.

KEES It's supposed to chill your soul! That means we haven't grown numb yet! We're not like the other tourists that only drive by these townships in airconditioned

busses, on their way to their massages and cocktails. We dare to visit the real world, the real poverty, the real misery. The real heat! *And* we take pictures! The clicking of the camera is a way of saying to that kid: You exist and that is ok with us.

- DENISE Please.
- KEES That's the real South Africa, Denise!
- NTANDO South Africa has too many faces to call just one the real face.
- KEES Well, of course, but---
- DENISE I just wanted to take the poor kid in my arms.
- KEES You'd better watch out, you'll catch a parasite. *(to Ntando)* No offense.
- NTANDO Why should I take offense?
- KEES Because of the parasites.
- NTANDO Nangu umuntu ezenzisa! Lokhu wenza sengathi uyasizwela! Amateurist!¹
- KEES Excuse me?
- NTANDO It's a Zulu proverb. To scare the parasites away.
- KEES That's beautiful. I really love Zulu.
- DENISE I wanted to take the poor kid home. Give her a real future.
- KEES You're too old for adoption.
- DENISE I meant it metaphorically.
- KEES You're also too old for a metaphorical adoption.
- DENISE I'm not talking about adoption!
- KEES Good. 'Cause that'll be the kitten from Portugal all over again. You can take it to the vet ten times, but that eye keeps leaking pus. It'll be the same with the kid. Looks sweet and all, but you'll never get all the parasites out.
- NTANDO *(offended)* A kid is not a cat!
- KEES *(to Ntando)* No. It's a metaphorical cat. *(to Denise)* And before you know it, the metaphorical cat will crawl under the metaphorical cupboard and metaphorically die!
- DENISE Kees!

¹ You're the parasite here, feeding your conscience with our misery. Tourist.

KEES It'll die. Of Ebola or Cholera or Aids or whatever exotic disease they're infested with here. And who has to metaphorically bury the poor thing in the backyard?

DENISE Kees!

KEES Right, Kees!

DENSIE You can't just say all those things!

KEES Why not, I am a Dutch citizen for christ's sake. I've got freedom of speech!

DENISE Not in front of the guide.

KEES Oh shit, I am sorry.

DENISE Don't apologize to me. Apologize to Ntando. (*she's pronouncing it wrong*)

NTANDO (*correcting her*) Ntando.

KEES I am very sorry that I say all those things about the metaphorical cats and kids in your country. I can't quite function when it's this hot. I feel like a hondelul.

NTANDO Hondelul?

KEES The dick of a dog. I am usually very politically correct, but somehow I don't know how to behave down here.

NTANDO south Africa can come across quite overwhelming when you're here for the first time. Abazi lutho labantu, ngathi izingulube².

DENISE Another proverb?

NTANDO Yes.

DENISE Beautiful.

KEES Do you have children?

NTANDO Yes. Two. A boy and a girl.

DENISE That's lovely. Are they in school right now?

NTANDO No, they're not.

DENISE Because you're too poor right?

NTANDO No.

DENISE (*she doesn't listen*) That's terrible.

NTANDO But I'm not---

² Especially when they're as dumb as a warthog.

DENISE *(she doesn't listen)* Maybe we should put those poor kids through school?

NTANDO That really isn't necessary. *(they don't listen)*

KEES I don't know, Denise, it's only to soothe your conscience.

DENISE Oh shut up. It'll be like Wilma supporting that school in Ghana. We'll have our own humanitarian project, that'll show the bitch!

KEES As long as you're paying for it yourself.

DENISE How does that sound, shall we put your kids through school?

NTANDO That's all very kind of you ma'am, but as I said it really isn't necessary.

DENISE But I insist! For a good future your children need a good education!

NTANDO And they're getting one, just not today. It's Saturday. Surely Dutch kids don't attend school on Saturdays, right?

DENISE Right...

NTANDO So...

DENISE *(getting closer)* I am sorry.

NTANDO Never mind it.

DENISE *(getting very close)* No really, I am truly sorry.

NTANDO *(getting more uncomfortable)* Apology accepted.

DENISE Thank you. *(getting really too close to Ntando now)* You smell really nice you know.

NTANDO *(getting a bit uncomfortable)* Right. Ok. Thank you. Now I want to tell you something about the struggle. *(he tries to get away from Denise, she keeps getting close and keeps sniffing him).*

KEES At home in Holland we are very progressive you know.

NTANDO I am sure you are.

DENISE What is that? Coconut?

KEES We are! We are all left wing and everyone is equal and such. And here I just sound like a huge overheated klotzak.

NTANDO Klotzak?

DENISE The sack that holds your balls.

NTANDO Ah yes.

DENISE I bet it's coconut.

KEES At home I do all the good things. I used to boycott apartheid.

DENISE But not *just* coconut.

KEES Everybody did in Holland. I'm sure we helped ending it.

DENISE I smell something deep too, something dark.

KEES All those things are in the past now, right?

NTANDO Well, even with apartheid abolished, we still have a lot of racial tensions in South Africa.

KEES Yeah, but Mandela ended racism didn't he?

NTANDO It's not that simple.

DENISE I think I can smell Africa on your skin.

NTANDO Please don't---

KEES We just love Mandela.

DENISE You smell like Africa and I love it.

KEES We love Barack Obama too.

DENISE I love Africa.

KEES Me too. It's just too hot.

NTANDO Nawe ubanda njengezwe lakini³.

DENISE That's beautiful Umthondo.

NTANDO What? No! Umthondo means prick!

DENISE Oh I'm so sorry!

NTANDO My name is Ntando!

KEES Yes. Umthondo.

NTANDO Ntando! Ntando!

KEES Umthondo.

NTANDO You can't talk to me like that! Even my own people don't talk to me like that! (*making up the following*) I am a descendent from the Royal family, you know!

KEES Royalty? Without a crown?

³ And you're as cold as your country.

NTANDO Don't insult me! I am the great great great grandson of... Nomchoba! Who gave birth to u Sonjalose. Who was the father of Sotobe. I am to be treated with respect.

DENISE I think it is beautiful. To know where you come from. To have such insight to your roots.

KEES Well, it's all very impressive, sure, but that's the past isn't it? We can't stay stuck in the past if we want to move forward.

NTANDO You should honour your heritage.

KEES I'd say it's all about being in the now. We have to look into the future.

DENISE I don't agree.

NTANDO But what do you know about honour, right?

DENISE *(she ignores him)* My roots are here, you know.

KEES Your roots are in Suriname.

NTANDO You don't know anything.

KEES *(he ignores him)* Suriname is South America, not South Africa.

NTANDO And if you won't listen, I can't educate you.

DENISE *(she ignores him)* My ancestors came from Africa.

NTANDO You'll just stay ignorant.

KEES *(he ignores him)* All of our ancestors came from Africa. But you don't hear me singing halleluja about my roots.

NTANDO Your ancestors would cry if they'd know they led up to you. Both of you.

KEES *(he turns to Ntando)* Sshht!

NTANDO Don't sshht me!

KEES Not now, I'm talking to Denise Umthondo.

NTANDO All right, that's it, I'm off. Hayi ilima phela lezi⁴.

As Kees and Denise engage in their fight, Ntando leaves angry. Kees and Denise are too busy with each other to notice him gone.

DENISE – You wouldn't understand. You're too pale to understand.

KEES – You know what my mother used to say, when I said I was hungry? She'd say: Hungry? You know who's hungry? The children in Africa, *they're* hungry!

⁴ Idiots.

DENISE Jesus, Kees.

KEES And when I refused to eat she'd say: Just think about the poor starving children in Africa. And she'd show me a red cross pamphlet, with a picture of a starving child in Ethiopia. And I'd have to finish my supper, with that picture of the poor African kid in front of me, with the swollen belly and the flies in the eyes and everything!

DENISE Why are you telling me this?

KEES Because, I don't know, because I might be pale but I am not ignorant, okay! Don't tell me that I don't understand things just because I am white, because I saw the starving children, okay! So don't tell me you know more than me, just because your skin is a few shades darker than mine.

DENISE Since I set foot on African soil I can feel something changing. It's like my blood is telling me something.

KEES Oh, you've got talking blood now? You were born in Holland! You're more Dutch than me! You eat the cheese, you ride the bicycle, you don't even speak a word of Surinamese!

DENISE It's called Sranang Tongo.

KEES Oh please.

DENISE You can mock it all you like, but I can feel my winti.

KEES Your what now?

DENISE The spirits that are with me, my Surinamese ancestors, my African ancestors, they are talking to me, they are talking to me since I am here, it is only now that I can hear them. That I can understand them. I can feel them filling up the hole inside me, they form my soul inside me, for the first time in my life I am complete.

KEES I thought I made you complete...

DENISE You can never make me complete. Your parents are from Arnhem. And the parents of your parents are from Arnhem. Et cetera. You came from the Arnhem mud and your soul is made of Arnhem clay. But me? I've got a global soul. You'll never understand.

KEES Oh no? You know why you've got a global soul? Because *my* ancestors shipped you from Africa to Suriname. Because *my* ancestors gave you a Dutch passport. Because *my* ancestors let you come to Holland. So, strictly speaking, this basking glow of your global soul is a triple thank you to *my* ancestors.

DENISE ...

KEES I am sorry.

DENISE ...

KEES I am so sorry.

DENISE You can go back to the hotel now.

KEES It's the heat...

DENISE I'll stay here, with Ntando (*she is saying it right from now on*). I am home now.

KEES Honey?

DENISE I bet Ntando can give me the *Real* African experience.

KEES Come on Denise...

DENISE Right, Ntando? I bet you can show me what it means to be a real man! (*no answer, he is gone*) Ntando?

KEES Where is he?

DENISE Ntando?!

KEES He left us? All alone?

DENISE Ntando!

KEES In a township?

DENISE Oh my god, do you know how to get back?

KEES Honey, I don't even know where we are!

DENISE Ntando, come back!

KEES Ssshht! They'll hear us!

DENISE Who will?

KEES I don't know, robbers? The kind of people that would like to do certain things to white tourists...

DENISE I'm not white...

KEES I don't think they'll mind, honey.

DENISE But I'm not-

KEES Please be quiet now. Please.

DENISE I'm scared.

KEES Me too, honey.

DENISE (*softly*) Ntando...?

KEES Could you please hold me?

DENISE *(softly)* Please come back...

KEES Please, honey, could you please hold me...

She looks at him, takes a few steps, as she is getting closer the light fades, their voices fade...

DENISE *(softly)* Please ...

KEES Honey...

DENISE Please come back...

KEES Could you hold me...

DENISE Come back...

KEES Please...

END