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| The Redeemer |
| Written by J.N.Mkhwanazi |
| An intriguing short South African story of redemption, a story of a young man from humble beginnings, a man introduced to the world of dirty politics and betrayal, a man who became an integral component of the notorious killing machinery of the South African ‘Third’ force during the height political violence of the early 1990s, this a story of a man who lost his identity, dignity and almost everything he has ever loved in a quest to appease the feelings of those who differed with him, and how he sought redemption. |

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Characters in the Book/play

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| Mgandi Nhlengethwa | Main character |
| Nolwandle | His lovely wife |
| Mbali | His Elder Daughter |
| Ntokozo | His Son |
| Mpizonke Nxumalo | His Uncle |
| Madoda ‘Sniper’ Khumalo | The Recruiter and Commander |
| Pottie | The Planner and Supplier of Weapons |
| Muzi Ntombela |  |

Introduction

It is an intriguing story of an ambitious young family man, full of life and enthusiasm. This profoundly cultured young man dreams of building a better future and working hard for his family. He is determined to support his family, spend as much quality time as possible with the only woman he has ever loved, and give his two wonderful children a better education.

He left his homestead in search of a better life somewhere in the else country, deep in the land of possibilities , a land that he has been told a lot about, a land that those before him went in search of a better life, in order to provide for his family, after all it is expected of him as the eldest son of the Nxumalo family to lead the way to the land of the unknown which is alive with possibilities, as he left behind his beloved one, with nothing to take along with him other than the tiny suitcase that contains his clothe, his personal identity documents and the captured memories of his beloved wife and two children, these are the most precious and essential belongings that he holds dearly in his heart, yet as he undertakes this courageous journey to the land of possibilities , deep in his heart of hearts he knows that it will not be an easy journey , the life he is about to begin was novel, he has been told about the good, bad and the ugly of the land that he is destined for, the land is going to, is capable of giving and taking away too, through his young life he has seen many of his homeboy’s life being changed for better and worse, but he is a man too now, he has to cross the bridge and prove his manhood, he needs to take care of his family as well and this one a life time opportunity.

He knows that there is no turning back now. After all, his uncle Mpizonke Khumalo has already done some groundwork. He will be sharing a room with him at Kwesine Hostel in Johannesburg while the hostel induna, Mr Maziwamadoda Ndlovu, is still arranging an apartment of his own at the hostel.

Journey to Johannesburg

The poor Mgandi is so excited he can’t even sleep, and he is ready for the much-awaited journey to the dreamland; he is the first one to wake up early in the morning; he takes a bath, he has to take the first bus, when he is through with the preparations and ready to leave, he gets few words of advice from his mother, he is accompanied to the bus stop by his lovely wife Nolwandle and his two wonderful children which are Khaya (the elder son and Mbali, a daughter), upon arrival at the bus stop, whilst waiting for the bus, he still has a moment to have a casual chat with his family, he reassures his wife Nolwandle that the journey he is about to undertake will bring the much-needed change in their lives and will enable them to build a better future for themselves and the children,

Mbali, ‘ I love you with all my heart, Mgandi, you mean the world to me; it’s only you and your children that I love, please take care of yourself Her eyes are filled with tears at that moment,

Mngadi, ‘I will always love you and never forget you nor the children; you are why I’m determined to lead a better life.’

At that moment, the bus arrives. Mngadi watches in sadness as his two children and the love of his life, Nolwandle, wave goodbye. Mngadi, too, is becoming emotional as the bus drives off. His heart is now eager to arrive in Gauteng. He is counting the hours before he arrives. He is heard humming a song softly, ‘............’

He finally reaches.

2. Observing the unjust war

3. The Recruitment

Mngadi observed without taking any note about the presence of this stone-faced man in a grey suit, wearing thick glasses; the man hardly smiled; he always put up a straight face like nothing around him had any positive or negative impact; the man every time he visited, he only speaks to Mpizonke ‘Sniper’ Nxumalo, you can’t hear a word they say, only the nodding of heads and handshakes, exchange of briefcases and that marks the end of a very short meeting.

Mpizonke Nxumalo will normally have about two meetings with this guy on a weekly basis. On the 4th of March 1991, around 18h30 pm, this unknown guy was seen entering the gates of Kwesine Hostel. He is driving his white Mercedes Benz, which is later followed by a sky-blue delivery vehicle with two occupants inside.

4. Collateral Damage

5. Sleepless Nights

5. The Unexpected

On the cold morning of the 22nd of July 1993 (Wednesday), Mngadi wakes up in the morning in high spirits; of course, the love of his life is coming to visit him. He has made all the necessary preparations, and he wants it to be a very special day for him, his lovely pregnant wife Nolwandle and his two children; he is very excited, he gets carried away by the good feeling, and he can’t wait for his wife to see his newly acquired apartment and the new furnisher he has bought with his hard ‘earned’ money, he turns on the volume of his portable radio, his favourite traditional song by the soul brothers is on play, he is heard singing his lungs out in joy, as he prepares a breakfast for himself, at 06h20am, he hears a knock on his door,

Knock, knock!!

Mngadi ‘who’s there’,

Mpizonke replies, ‘It’s me, my good friend. Were you expecting someone else?’

Mngadi: ‘Come in, my dear friend. I’m not expecting anyone. How can I help you?’

Mpizonke, speaking very softly, ‘We need to go somewhere today, my friend; it’s our last job for the month, and the stakes are high. I need you on this one; you are one of my best men.’

Mngadi, not looking happy at all, ‘but my friend…’

Mpizonke interrupts him, ‘We have to do this one. It’s only a one-hit-and-run, the easiest actually. Please, my friend.’

Mngadi, ‘what time and where?’

Mpizonke ‘Denver, or we can do random hitting’.

Mngadi ‘I said what time’.

Mpizonke: ‘Don’t be upset with me now, my brother. You also need money as much as I do; it’s our source of income; we are leaving at 07h30 am.’

Mngadi is evidently not happy with this arrangement. It’s so sudden, and after all, today is a special day for him. He has to be ready for his visiting family; they need to find him in good shape. He has had enough of these sleepless nights. He is emotionally and spiritually polarised. He wants to get over this. This is not the life he wanted to lead. He is a decent man, after all.

He finally decides to take this final ‘job’ of the month. Still, it must be done very quickly, as he has bigger plans for the day, in any way he has taken part in many of these hit-and-run jobs before, attacking the unsuspecting and defenceless people proven to be one of the most straightforward tasks a man can do, he has even earned himself a good reputation amongst his team, his natural fighting skills have proven deadly when combined with the use of weapons such as rifles and guns, he alone can take up to ten souls at a go, he is a gallant fighter.

07h32 am

The ‘hit and run’ team of about 30 armed men awaits at the front gate; they are battle-ready, singing traditional songs and pronouncing praises; the practice is effective since it lifts their spirits. Mgandi emerges from the cottages wearing a brown waistcoat, a khaki trouser and a pair of safety shoes; he knows that the weapons of war are ready to be used, and he now commands respect amongst the team; as he approaches, he is greeted like a general of the armed forces,

Mpizonke ‘let’s go, time is running out’.

They all left, proceeding to the targeted area,

**08h55 am**

on his arrival at the Denver station, they are greeted by the empty platforms, there is no one, not even the tickets examiners are around, the atmosphere is so tense, it seems like there are only hunters but no prays, but they know that they have to wait for the next train with unsuspecting and defenceless commuters to come by, their weapons concealed underneath their waist coast, as the sound of the approaching train gets louder, they ready themselves for the last ‘job’ of the month, it must be swift and effective, they must kill and maim as many as possible, the team is operating in groups and in a particular formation, an average of eight team group is quite enough to exterminate the whole carriage of the train, the crusade of terror-spreading is in full force, as the train emerges, they take up their respective positions in groups, the innocent fathers, mothers, children, old and young commuters unaware of the terror they are about to be subjected to, having left their beloved ones at home in search of a better life, they are about to be slaughtered

**08h57 am**

As the train stops, they all go on board, each team choosing a random coach; they all understand their mandate, a mandate to kill everything that breathes; after all, it’s a cruel war, a so-called war to protect a sacred culture, and a show of strength, for a moment they observe the people on the coach, they take up positions inside, as the train steams away, the Great Mngadi is the first to draw his rifle, he mercilessly sprays the defenceless people inside the train with bullets, his team follow suit, some are armed with spears and machetes, the slaughter of the innocence is carried out, innocent people screaming in agony, some pleading for their dear lives, but they were not spared, they perished under his brutal arm, no mercy, so did the other death squads on the other coaches, they are mercilessly killing everyone in the train.

**09h09 am**

The next train stop is their gateway; they need to escape undetected as they usually do; the team manages to execute the massacre of the innocent and defenceless people as planned; a gateway truck awaits them at the next train station; they all go back to their places of residents having done what they were expected to do, as they arrive at the hostel, the ‘Sniper’ Mpizonke, hands out envelopes and collects some of the weapons used during the attack,

**09h48 am**

Mgandi quickly rushes home; as a cultured man, he knows that he has to perform a traditional practice to cleanse and free himself from the souls that he has perished under his arm; he takes a bath in water that is mixed with a conventional portion meant to chase away evil spirits, as soon as he is finished, he double checks that everything is in order and will have the everlasting good impression on his family,

**16h50 pm**

He seats on the veranda of his apartment, waiting for the arrival of his loved ones; around 17h00 pm, he pays a visit to his uncle’s apartment; he is in high spirits; the uncle can read between the lines that the great Mgandi was on cloud nine, very excited on the fact that his wife and children were visiting him,

**17h15 pm**

Mgandi is becoming increasingly worried about his wife and two children; he sets out and asks his friend Mpizonke to accompany him to look for her at Park Station in Johannesburg; upon arrival at the Johannesburg station, he looks around and asks people, but vain, they later decided to go back to the website hostel, maybe she decided to postpone the trip due to unforeseen circumstances, they later return to the hostel.

Mgandi spends the better part of the night with Mpizonke drinking beer and engaging in some serious conversation about their future and that of their culture. They get along very well since they both share the very same ideology and culture. They are united in defence of everything they grew up knowing and determined to do anything to achieve their course.

The following morning

**Thursday the 23rd of July 1993**

The following morning, Mgandi woke up with this feeling that he needed to determine the sudden postponement of the trip by his wife, but it was unlike her since she wrote a letter to him confirming her arrival on the 22nd of July; he looked for the letter again on her wardrobe and reads it once more, yes, it says that she will be here on the 22nd of July, it’s her handwriting, he has been reading the letter over and over again in excitement, he couldn’t have been wrong.

**10h15 am**

Mgandi is increasingly worried about his family but is not in a position to communicate with people back home until Friday or after he has written a letter and received a response from her.

**15h10 pm**

He notifies his uncle about his desperation now, and his uncle advises him to report the matter to the authorities; this matter needs to be treated with a sense of urgency; it involves two innocent souls and a pregnant woman, and it can’t be normal for them to be unaccounted for, for throughout 24 hrs, he then goes to the Denver Police Station to report the matter alongside his uncle, and a missing persons case is registered with the Denver police department

**16h30 pm**,

When they were through with the case registration, his uncle suggested they start looking at the local hospitals. They went to a local hospital in search of something they were never sure of, and the uncle told him they couldn’t wait for a confirmation from home; they had to play their part on this side of the country after all this Transvaal. This is Johannesburg, a land of the good, the bad, and the ugly.

They searched at the local hospital at the Vein until they both agreed that they should start the search tomorrow and try to send someone home to confirm if she did make her way with the children to Johannesburg and, if so, when they left no stone unturned in search of them.

Mgandi couldn't sleep at night. He was deeply worried about the recent happenings. How could her wife promise to visit and suddenly change her mind? Was it something he did? Was she angry over something?

**On the morning of the 24th of July, 1993**

Mgandi hears a knock on his door. A part of him tells him that it could be her family. He rushes to the door, only to be greeted by the face of her uncle.

Uncle ‘Good morning Mgandi, prepare yourself. We don’t have time.’

Mgandi ‘uncle, where are we going now?

Uncle, we must face reality; we must be men enough, courageous men, Mgandi, and search all the possible places. Please come with me; there is one more place we should search now.

Mgandi: ‘Uncle, your words give me hope; I couldn’t even sleep the past two nights; I miss her so much already; let me get ready.’

Mgandi’s uncle couldn’t utter a word during the Journey. He first asked Mgandi to go to the local police station to find out from the detectives if there had been progress made on the reported case of missing persons. Upon arrival at the Denver Police Station, they approached the help desk and stated their reason for the visit. A detective assigned to the case attended to them and informed them that there had been no progress.

Detective, I’m sorry to inform you that we still haven’t found your family or had any leads on the case. However, I must point out that we are doing everything from our side to get them back safely to you.

Uncle: ‘Thanks, detective, for your efforts; please do more because my niece here is very worried. He couldn’t sleep, too, and I was becoming concerned. ‘

As they were leaving the police station, the detectives looked at the docket once more and ran towards them,

Detective: ‘You say she was supposed to arrive on the 22nd of July?’

Mgandi ‘Yes, detective, do you have something maybe’.

Detective, Looking Mgandi right in the eye, replies, ‘No, nothing, my apologies’.

Mgandi’s uncle takes a deep breath. He keeps quiet for a moment, like he is gathering the strength to say something to Mgandi, and he eventually manages to utter his words,

Uncle Mgandi, let's intensify our search now. Let’s go to Germiston. There is a place we must search for; many people recently found their loved ones there.

Mgandi: ‘Let’s go, uncle; I’m still optimistic that we will find them, and uncle, thanks once more for being there for me; throughout my life, you have been playing a very central role; let’s go.’

**Arrival at Germiston**

Upon arrival at Germiston, Mgandi’s uncle leads the way. He parks the car next to a massive building. They get inside. The uncle speaks to the receptionist, who later asks them to be seated while waiting for someone to assist them. All this time, everything seems not to be making any sense to Mgandi. He looks confused, but the uncle understands the situation and takes up a leading role.

Mgandi ‘Uncle, exactly what’s this place? Do you think there is a chance of us getting my wife and children here?’

His uncle didn’t have the strength to answer him. Finally, a guy approached them and asked, ‘When did you last see them?’ What were their names? Do you have a description of the clothing that they were wearing?

Mgandi stood up with a faint smile on his face. Nolwandle Nhlengethwa, Mbali, and Kwazi Nhlengethwa, do you have them here?

The man looked into his registry, verifying the names and answers.

‘Yes, I have Nolwandle Nhlengethwa. She arrived on Wednesday, July 22nd, and you can wait for her while I do the identification paperwork.

Mgandi, with a glimmer of hope on his face, smiles.

Mgandi’s uncle broke down in tears, seeing that his niece Mgandi didn’t even realise what a gruesome discovery and tragedy that family was faced with at that point; he was compelled to inform Mgandi to prepare for the worst, but it all looked like Mgandi was clueless throughout the ordeal, the man called them to identify the body, as they move in, Mgandi was hit with a harsh reality that this is no place for the living but for the dead.

As they entered the identification room, Mgandi noticed the motionless body of his wife lying on the silver steel table; he couldn’t contain himself; no second explanation was necessary when he saw his wiping uncle; the truth was that the lifeless body of his wife was lying there before him, how could it happen to him, all the dreams, all the efforts, what about his love, what about his children, Mngadi’s whole world came tumbling down.

The tragic discovery was just the beginning; the police officers informed them that there a couple of bodies which were picked up from the scene of the massacre that was still ought to be identified, including that of children too; fearing the worst, his uncle asked the staff to take Mgandi away as he was composing himself to identify more bodies, all hell broke loose when the two young bodies of a boy and a girl were brought forward for identification, the family has lost everything within a wink of an eye.

6. Owning up to Life

7. Life after Redemption

8. The End