

He retreated from the cubicle and that elicited some sounds of triumph from his many opponents in the room.

One said “ja.” Another asked, “who does he think he is?” And the police officers seemed to find all this amusing if judged by their giggles and smiles.

Tom didn’t sit down where the other people where but stood next to the door.

“Triton,” said a voice from his left side. Obviously, someone entering from outside. He looked and saw Terrence Nonto standing right next to him.

“What is happening and why is your phone off?” asked Nonto. Tom remembered that he last switched his phone off while in court and, in the rush to pay bail for his client, had forgotten about it.

“Sorry. I forgot to switch it on after court. I didn’t know you were around,” said Tom.

“There is a reason I’m here, but we will talk about it later. I learnt from the traditional leader that bail has been fixed, and you said you have the funds on you,” said Nonto.

“That is correct. I have already paid, and I am here to retrieve him,” said Tom showing Nonto the receipt.

“So, what is the hold up?” asked Nonto.

“The officers over there say I have to wait for my turn. I didn’t want to fight them. I’m tired and I think I may just aggravate matters if I insisted. Besides, they seem to enjoy mistreating me,” said Tom.

“Aggravate matters my foot! You are the lawyer. You went in there and spent the day arguing with other lawyers to secure this man’s release. Who the hell are they to tell you to wait in the queue?” said Nonto taking the receipt and walking to the nearest cubicle.

It was neither the cubicle of the policewoman who refused to serve Tom nor that of the policeman who kept meddling. Tom didn’t say anything.

“What is this story about that advocate having to wait for his turn to get his client out of here? Is that your policy?” Nonto asked the policewoman who was not even part of the earlier drama.

The woman had been serving a young boy who had apparently been beaten up and thrown out of his home by his stepfather. Nonto’s question startled the boy. He shot up from the chair and seemed to be about to sprint through the door.

Nonto seemed to have observed this and immediately softened his tone and said, “Sorry, son. It is okay. Sit down.”

He brushed the boy’s hair as he said so. A perfect grandfather consoling a little boy.

“Oh! Another one holding the queue up. Did he not tell you what the people said? Everyone must join the queue,” said the meddler in the next cubicle.

“I need your name officer. I can’t see properly. I know you have a duty to give it to me. Someone up there has to hear about your service,” said Nonto squinting as he tried to make out the officer’s name from the tag.

“So, I must stop work and give you names? You can report wherever you wish,” said Mr Meddler rudely and waving his hand. The “go away” or even “go to hell” sign.

Nonto, to Tom’s surprise, retreated from the cubicle. He took his phone out and dialled while eyeing Mr Meddler. He looked very angry and, momentarily, Tom thought he might be going for his gun when he put his hand in the jacket pocket.

“One of your officers is being unreasonable here. I don’t know what they are up to but we have paid Joel Malebana’s bail and now they are refusing to serve us. They kept his lawyer here in the queue and now I’m here and they told me the same thing. I tell you, Teeler, you have to do something about this. Not only about us, but if this is how they treat people, shame on you and all your force,” ranted Nonto into his phone.

All the officers had stopped working and were watching Nonto whose voice was beaming throughout the police station.

“Let me tell you. It is not even the foolishness of what they say that upsets me. It is the arrogance and rudeness that they say it with,” said Nonto.

After listening for a while to whatever the person on the other side was saying, Nonto said, “You better speak to him. I don’t trust myself with him. I really have no time for fools in police uniform. While at it, tell him that he has a duty to give his name to a member of the public if asked for it.”

To Mr Meddler, Nonto said, “Your boss wants to talk to you. Unless you want him to stand in the queue too.”

Someone missed by a lightning, even though Tom hadn’t seen such a person before, would be in a better position than Mr Meddler. He seemed frightened, surprised, confused and about to run for it. He looked at Nonto and his phone as if the two were about to bite him.

Hesitantly, Mr Meddler took the phone from Nonto.

“Hello,” said Mr Meddler into Nonto’s phone.

“No, Commissioner. It is just that we were busy with other people in the station. We were going to assist them. We will attend to them right away, Commissioner. I understand, Sir. Very well, commissioner.”

That is all Tom could hear Mr Meddler, evidently wounded, babbling into the phone.

After saying “goodbye commissioner”, he held the phone and looked at it for a while until Nonto said, “Are you going to give me my phone? Or must I wait in the queue for that too?”

“No, Commissioner,” Mr Meddler said to Nonto.

Nonto laughed and shook his head while walking towards Tom. Still holding the bail receipt in his hand.

In the cubicle, the lady who had refused to serve Tom right at the beginning had stopped working. She had both hands on her mouth.

All the cops and the people in the station to be served had their eyes glued on Mr Meddler.

“It was the national commissioner. I think I am toast. We are all toast. He says he will be here to check the kind of service we offer for himself. He also says he wants me to write the names of everyone on duty. We are done, I tell you,” said Mr Meddler looking extremely worried.

Tom was enjoying the torture Mr Meddler seemed to be going through.

Nonto’s phone rang. He barked “hello”.

“I could only make his side of the line. Thank you for the intervention anyway. No. They are still not serving us,” said Nonto.

“No, let them be. I’ll see what they do after this and let you know. It is a pity though that we have such quality of officers in the country’s police service,” said Nonto.