

# THE MATTERS OF THE SOUL

By Timothy Chilezi

A full-length play

ACT 1: SET UP

Setting.

MARLENE'S KITCHEN AND BAKERY - NIGHT

JANET is seated on the left-hand side of the stage; a spotlight shines on her as she is seated at the restaurant table sobbing while holding her head. ROCHELLE walks into the restaurant, rolling her luggage into the restaurant. The doorbell rings as Rochelle enters, gaining the attention of Janet. A spotlight shines on Rochelle, gaining the attention of Janet.

JANET

(looks across stage)

Rochelle? You're... you're here.

*Janet stands up from her seat.*

ROCHELLE

I'm here Janet.

*Janet runs across the stage while the spotlight follows her. She runs towards Rochelle, hugging her as she cries on her shoulder.*

JANET

(crying)

I didn't think you'd come back, hey? Why did you take so long to get here?

ROCHELLE

(sighs)

I tried to get here as soon as I got the news. I was held up at the workplace.

*Janet immediately stops hugging Rochelle and looks at her straight in the eyes while wiping her tears.*

JANET

(angry)

Hayi man Rochelle! Why am I not surprised? Ma died for heaven's sake, and you couldn't even spare just a moment.

ROCHELLE

I shouldn't have even bothered, hey? I knew you weren't going to get it. Janet, I can't just get up and leave, nje! I explain this all the time!

JANET

You know what neh? I'm not doing this. Enough is enough man. You are not being serious!

*Janet walks back to the left of the stage towards the table she was sat at.*

ROCHELLE

(panting)

Wait a minute, Janet. Just use those two ornaments on the sides of your head and listen! Why must we always argue? Arg man! Not when Ma would want us to be stronger than ever without her.

*Janet turns her head towards Rochelle from across the stage. She looks bemused.*

JANET

(shouting)

Sorry? You watch who you speaking to, wena Rochelle! You are the one that left us Rochelle! No calls, no texts, nothing! Go and chase your dream Rochelle, sharp, cool, but you ditched us. Ma wanted you here, she needed you here Rochelle. She wasn't asking you to be here forever! You know neh...

*Janet lowers her tone as Rochelle is stood still in the middle of the stage, her head held down.*

Pause

JANET (CONT'D)

(calmly)

Ma wanted you to be a part of this. A part of us. It just hurts me that Ma had to die for you to finally think, "Oh yah, now it's time to go home!"

*Janet grabs the chair and sits at the table. Rochelle places her luggage in front of the restaurant counter and proceeds to follow Janet to the table and grabs a chair to sit on.*

ROCHELLE

Ma wanted me here?

*Janet nods her head in agreement as she begins to cry.*

ROCHELLE (CONT'D)

I thought Ma was happy to see me go for my dreams. Go to the city. She knew how much this law thing meant to me.

JANET

(her voice cracking)

But to never come back? Ma didn't even get the chance to see her two girls rock this restaurant, together! It's just...

*Janet is overwhelmed by emotion and breaks into tears. Rochelle grabs her chair and moves closer to Janet. Rochelle hugs Janet tightly while she cries on her chest. Janet cry becomes gradually louder. Rochelle stares into the distance with her head rested on Janet's head. The stage lights dim, and the spotlight remains on Rochelle and Janet in the corner of the stage.*

LIGHTS DOWN:

ACT 2: CLIMAX

LIGHTS UP.

Setting.

MARLENE'S RESTAURANT DINING ROOM - THE NEXT DAY

*There are restaurant dining tables that surround the stage. Janet and Rochelle are seated at the table centre of the stage. On the desk is the RECIPE BOOK. Janet pages through the book while Rochelle sits beside her, reading through each recipe.*

ROCHELLE

(sighs)

Ah! Ma's famous Dombolo recipe. When was the last time I had this? I swear, she added something special in here.

JANET

Never gets old. You know, there was one time where almost the whole of Joburg stopped by here just to get a taste of this. This was Ma's pride and joy.

Pause.

*Janet continues to page in the RECIPE BOOK. Rochelle looks at Janet while she continues reading the RECIPE BOOK.*

ROCHELLE (V.O.)

*Plays through the speakers while Rochelle looks at her sister.*

I must let her know. There is no way that we can continue with this restaurant. We just cannot keep up.

*Rochelle comes back to reality.*

JANET

Remember when we all had-

*Janet is interrupted by Rochelle.*

ROCHELLE

(impulsively)

I think we should sell this place, hey?

Pause

*Janet looks up at Rochelle in disbelief. She sits up straight.*

JANET

(confused)

Sorry?

*Janet leans in closer.*

ROCHELLE

(shyly)

Erm, yah. This place must go. There is no way that we can keep it going. Not at the rate that Ma did. Let's, you know, bank on it now so that we can-

*Janet shuts the recipe book*

JANET

(angrily)

Wait a minute! Are you even hearing yourself? This is my mother's legacy. OUR mother's legacy. Are you even comprehending the words coming out of that little mouth of yours? Huh Rochelle?

ROCHELLE

But Janet, look at the bigger picture! We can start afresh. Start a new-

*Janet stands up out of her chair.*

JANET

(angrily)

I knew it! I knew it, Rochelle. Only now when Ma is gone, you want to come here and make decisions? Ou, the nerve!

ROCHELLE

We can't keep this place going. Think about Janet, this place needs Ma! We can't carry this burden. It's too much.

*Rochelle places her hand on the recipe book and Janet grabs it from underneath her hand.*

JANET

(defensively)

Burden Rochelle? Burden? Are you mad? What do you think I was doing for all of these years? Just standing here, serving tables, washing dishes? Huh? I know this restaurant like the back of my hand!

ROCHELLE

Janet, you know, I know, the whole damn world knows that nobody can make Ma's dishes the way that she did. That needs some magical powers, and you my sister, do not have it! Sorry.

JANET

(confidently)

Hey! Rochelle don't test me! I can do this with my eyes closed. Rochelle, Ma's ways live through me.

*Janet holds the recipe book close to her chest.*

ROCHELLE

Janet, you know what neh? Go to the kitchen now and cook something for us. Just know that everything is all, on, you!

*Janet looks down to the ground while holding the recipe book in her hands. Rochelle waits for a reply from Janet.*

JANET

Well, you know what neh? You know what? I'm going something for us, like you said. Dombolo, just the way you like it. One that would make Ma so proud! Mmmm! If I get it right, Marlene's Restaurant will remain.

*Janet begins to walk towards the kitchen, Rochelle closely following behind her.*

ROCHELLE

(confidently)

What happens if you don't? Then what? Because nobody will come here for food anywhere lower than Ma's standards.

*Janet and Rochelle stop in front of the kitchen island.*

JANET

Then watch me.

*Janet lays the recipe book down on the counter and turns the gas stove on. She begins flipping through the recipe book pages.*

JANET

(mumbling)

Dombolo, dombolo, dombolo... Here!

*Janet places her index finger on the page of the recipe.*



ROCHELLE

Janet, come on now. Let's think about what we are doing-

*Rochelle is interrupted by Janet's mumbling as she reads the recipe book.*

JANET

"4 cups of cake flour, 2 tablespoons of dry yeast, butter, oil". Okay, let us get those.

*Janet goes to the pantry to get the salt and flour. She grabs the salt first and then the flour, but the flour package slips from her hands and spills on the floor.*

JANET

(annoyed)

Damn it, man! Yoh!

*She picks up the flour bag from the floor and places it onto the counter, dusting her apron off.*

ROCHELLE

(irritated)

Janet! You're messing the place up!  
Calm down!

*Janet ignores Rochelle, walks past her and proceeds to the fridge. She opens the fridge looking for something.*

JANET

(frustrated)

Wait, why am I opening the fridge?  
I don't need anything here! Eish!

*Janet slams the fridge door and walks to the kitchen stove.*

ROCHELLE

(concerned)

Janet, calm down. Please-

JANET

(outbursts)

Shut up wena Rochelle! Yoh!

*Janet falls to the ground and bursts into tears. Rochelle sits down with Janet out of concern for her wellbeing.*

ROCHELLE

Janet don't do this to yourself now. Look at the mess you made.

*Rochelle sighs deeply.*

ROCHELLE (CONT'D)

You know what? Go upstairs? Take a chill pill. You need it! I'll stay down here and clean up, okay?

*Janet stands up and wipes her tears while walking off to the right of the stage. Rochelle is now alone on the stage.*

ROCHELLE

(to herself)

I told you; this isn't any child's play. But did you listen? No.

*Rochelle proceeds to sweep up the flour on the floor, place the salt and flour in the pantry and then pick up the recipe book and she drops it on the ground.*

ROCHELLE

(frustrated)

Eish, this recipe book.

*As Rochelle picks up the book, she stumbles upon a note stuck in the margin of the book. A voice over of Marlene plays representing the voice in Rochelle's head.*

MARLENE (V.O.)

"When they ask me what my secret is I always tell them, 'It's the power of collaboration that brings the comfort into the meals.'"

ROCHELLE AND MARLENE (V.O.)

(in sync)

"Work together."

Rochelle reads the note out loud and this helps her to understand the reason why Janet had a hard time. The curtains begin to close as Rochelle stands in the middle of the stage.

LIGHTS DOWN:

LIGHTS UP.

Setting.

ACT 3: THE RESOLUTION

*Rochelle and Janet are sat in the middle of the restaurant again. They are both in a sombre mood as they speak to each other.*

JANET:

Remember when we were younger, and we used to run around this place like some hooligans? Ma chased us around in the middle of service.

ROCHELLE:

And the customers just looked at us tear this place down. I swear they enjoyed seeing us cause havoc.

*Janet and Rochelle both burst into laughter thinking about the memories.*

JANET AND ROCHELLE:

(in sync)

Ah! Good times!

JANET:

I wish I could do something about this place. This is literally our home. For Ma's sake. I just need time and clarity to figure this out. I swear, I can do this.

ROCHELLE:

(sighs)

Ey, Janet. Not again! We spoke about this. It's best we get what we can from this and start something new, together.

JANET:

(begging)

But, Rochelle, the memories! I can't let them go just like that. Asseblief man.

*At the restaurant door, a bouquet of flowers and a note lay on the welcome mat.*

ROCHELLE:

And now, who are those from? Ou Janet! Are these for you? Seems like you have a secret admirer!

JANET:

(curious)

Oh, stop it, Rochelle. They can't be for me.

*Rochelle walks to the end of the stage and picks up the bouquet of flowers with the note.*

ROCHELLE:

Looks like we got a note here.

*Rochelle flips the note over.*

ROCHELLE (CONT'D):

(amused)

It says, "From the Community."

*Janet anxiously waits for Rochelle to read the note out loud.*

JANET:

(anxious)

Are you going to read that note next year? Open it already!

*Janet proceeds to grab the note from Rochelle as the anxiety begins to overwhelm. She paces up and down across the stage.*

JANET (CONT'D):

(reading)

"Dear Marlene's Restaurant staff, we express our condolences to you for the loss of the beloved pillar of the community, Marlene."

*Rochelle comes closer and reads the note with Janet.*

JANET (CONT'D):

"You've got this and we, as the community are here to support you and continue to grow this establishment. Kind Regards."

*Janet is moved to tears, and she takes one more opportunity to try and convince her sister about the place. But her thoughts are interrupted.*

ROCHELLE:

(annoyed)

Janet? Janet! We're not doing this again! We have already decided to move on!

*Janet walks across the stage to the left side and fetches the Recipe Book. Janet walks back to the middle of the stage and places the book on the table.*

JANET:

You know Rochelle? Here! Come and see this. These are Ma's words! Ma's wishes. Not for the restaurant, but for us.

*Rochelle reads the note in the recipe book.*

MARLENE (V.O.):

"My babies. This is my hope for you when I am no longer here. Be strong, hold each other up and keeps each other safe. Love is what will keep this going. Trust each other and trust the process. I love you all so much. From your mother, Marlene."

*Rochelle breaks down in tears the moment the voice over stops playing. The stage lights dim and the spotlight shines on Rochelle.*

ROCHELLE:

(crying)

This is what Ma really wanted? For us to work together? Janet, I'm sorry. I let you down and I let Ma down.

*Janet enters the spotlight and hugs her little sister. They both cry out loud as the voice of their mother lingers in the air.*

LIGHTS DOWN:

LIGHTS UP.

Setting.

CLOSING SCENE - THE NEW AND IMPROVED MARLENE'S RESTAURANT

*Janet and Rochelle are at the restaurant counter setting up the station of the reopening of Marlene's Restaurant the next day.*

JANET:

Menus?

ROCHELLE:

Check! Tables are set?

JANET:

Check. Ou! Wait...

*Janet runs to the edge of the stage turning the sign around from the 'Closed' side to the 'Opening Tomorrow' sign.*

JANET (CONT'D):

And done! Set up complete! Are you ready now Rochelle? Yoh, I'm so excited!

ROCHELLE:

I am ready! But before we continue, I just want to let you know, Ma would be so proud of you. You stood up for this place. Now we have something to remember Ma forever! Thank you, Janet.

*Janet hugs Rochelle tightly. They both grace each other with a warm embrace while Janet sheds a tear. They then open the recipe book after.*

JANET:

(wipes tears)

Yoh Rochelle! Why are you making me cry? You know how emotional I am! Eish!

*Janet stops and holds Rochelle by the hands.*

JANET (CONT'D):

Thank you, Rochelle. This means so much man. I love you so much!

ROCHELLE:

I love you too Janet. So much. Always remember that.

JANET:

Before we both start crying up a storm here, are we ready to go?

ROCHELLE:

Ya! Ready to go! Let's do this!

JANET:

Okay. We've got Ma's recipe book. Let's begin-

JANET AND ROCHELLE:

(reading)

"Ma's famous Dombolo recipe! Step  
1..."

The stage lights start to dim as Janet and Rochelle get the ingredients for the recipe. The curtains then begin to close.

THE END.



