

## *Income In The Bedroom*

Hi Thandi,  
I'm sending you this letter instead.

I'm avoiding calling you. Because I know a phone conversation turns into another argument. The last time we spoke in person, everything burned. Nothing we said reached the other. Just voices clashing, nothing landing, nothing staying.

The first day I met you, I fell in love.

When you met me, this happened: you met all the others that were with me that night - you just didn't see them. I call them my finances.

You met a man with a poor rent payment record. Electricity units almost finished. A humming fridge holding a couple of onions, milk that had turned - the smell catching at the back of the nose. And a pot of rice gone cold.

Cheap silver tooth fillings - which is why I'd often put a hand over my mouth when I laughed. Yes, my love - you didn't meet just me. You met my finances. You just didn't know it at the time.

I tried to hide them. But finances don't stay outside. They pull up a chair. They sit between two people and wait. I remember Pick & Pay. We needed a few things. Toilet paper. I picked one roll. You suggested one more.

From the outside, it looked like two people in a supermarket aisle, chatting. But from the inside, even if it only lasted a few seconds, something in me didn't sit right.

I didn't have language for it then. I just knew something had shifted.

And how right I was.

Money changes where you think your body starts and stops.

It can shrink your height. I have always known myself as tall. But with you, I became shorter and shorter - not in body, but in presence. In voice. In confidence.

There is a kind of shortness a man reaches where he can no longer stand up inside himself. I reached it with you. I became a short tall man in love.

Short in the way I spoke.

Short in the way I reached for you.

Short in the way I began to hold back... before being myself.

When you met me, you met my finances. And they were not neutral. They were not young either. They are older than me. They go back - far enough to meet my grandfather's. A

meeting I try not to stay with for too long. The man worked hard... and still came home with less than what his labour had earned.

Being a Black freelancer in South Africa... income is not just income. It is volatility. Delayed payments. Clients disappearing. Invoices travelling continents before they return as survival. Being skilled... and still uncertain.

We're taught a half-story:  
Lights on. Tie straight. Smile ready.  
Work hard. Get the keys.  
Show up no matter what.

The end.

Racial capitalism does not operate like a fair system. It operates like a quiet landlord. It does not always evict you loudly. It shrinks you slowly.

It extracts from your labour while calling it opportunity.  
It praises hustle while normalising exhaustion.  
It individualises failure while protecting the system that produced it.

And inside that system, something inhumane happens. We begin to measure human worth in money.

My love, you were easy to love. Life wasn't.

Which is why our arguments were never really about money. They were about power. About who feels secure. Who feels exposed. We weren't really arguing. We were stepping into a script already in progress.

If I'm honest... I resented you for not seeing the load I carried. But how could you see what I worked so hard to hide?

Shame is both an excellent and a cruel interior designer. It rearranges the room so no one notices the cracks... just long enough before the wall gives way.

But here is the truth I can finally say: It wasn't just my finances destabilising us. It was something larger than us - shaping what we believed a man should be, what a woman should expect, and what love must prove to survive.

Love is expected to behave like a private company: Solvent. Efficient. Always upward. Where a relationship is quietly audited against lifestyle. Against affordability. Against consistency - which starts to look like money.

And money starts to feel like proof. And when that proof is missing, something begins to buckle... and then, eventually, it snaps. Not just weekend plans. Voice. Posture. Presence.

The way a man sits across from the woman he loves. The way he listens - not just to her voice, or the wavering of his own, but to the voice in his head... and the one he imagines in hers.

This is what happens when the economy becomes the third person in a relationship.

You are inconsistent, you said.  
You are too demanding, I said.

We were gentle with each other... until we weren't.

We were both wrong. Our relationship didn't fail privately. It was structured to fail. We were not just two people in a relationship.

We were two people being quietly priced... in front of each other.

Strange what stays with you.

After that, you can't unsee it. It wasn't just us. The same script... playing out in the comments.

What are partners teaching each other when money is involved? That struggle means you failed? That love must be paid for? That a broke man is like a broken hand, useless – narrative of economics and intimacy.

Ever had to be a Black woman with nowhere else to turn... and had to ask - while he decides how small you should feel first? Ever had to exist outside "he" or "she", and defend your identity, while stretching what little you have to get through?

But there is something I wish I had asked you: How would love move between us... if neither of us measured the other by what we had at the time?

Wealth inequality doesn't live only in stock exchanges or policy rooms.

It lives in an awkward hug. In a glance that looks away too quickly. In the moment you hold your partner's gaze - and for a second, something shifts... as if something else has taken their place, measuring you.

The Global Majority inherits uncertainty. It was already at the table when I first met you. I don't say that to sit in victimhood. Only to name what was there.

And there it is... this is where something began to matter: The meaning we give a moment shapes what it becomes.

I used to believe meaning followed the situation - the event, the behaviour. That if the money got better, everything else would too. Well done, me.

Now I understand something different: meaning is not the result. It is the ground.

And if the ground is unstable - if every moment is quickly interpreted as lack, failure, or inadequacy - then even love begins to feel unsafe.

So the work became this: Not to deny what was happening... but to refuse to let it define what it meant about me... about you... about us.

Because even inside something designed to take from us, there is still a choice: To let it diminish us... or to turn it into ground. The same ground we rise from.

And I started noticing something else. The arguments we had were changing - but the questions underneath them were not. They kept returning in different forms. Different tones. Same root. Same questions.

So I started writing them down - these questions. They kept arriving after you left. Not as a way back to you... I knew better than that. But for people like us - to catch the moment mid-fall... before it hardens into a meaning we never agreed to.

*“What if wealth, between us, had meant peace... instead of possessions?”*

*“What’s one thing being without understands... that having forgets?”*

*“What’s one thing having reveals... that being without never gets to see?”*

I have been writing them down... one after the other...these questions. Not knowing what they were becoming. Until they became something I could hold.

I call them Cards of Us.



A domestic technology for interrupting extractive logic in intimate spaces. I’m shaping them into something you can hold in your hand.



Thirty-six cards.

Twelve HEART: Our feelings underneath the moment.

Twelve HEAD: Our beliefs shaping what we see.

Twelve HAND: Our actions that can change what happens next.

A practice for two people who refuse to let pressure turn into distance. They're not a game. They're what's left of us... in question form.

Not in the heat of an argument.

Not in the middle of defending.

Not while something is being performed.



There's a different role we could've stepped into. Not judge. Not accountant.

*A Meaning Holder.*

Someone who stays with a moment... a little longer. Long enough to choose - carefully - what it gets to mean... before it hardens into something that divides.

I didn't expect to think of you again like that. But the other day, I was cleaning and found your earring under the couch. It had been there all along.

Anyway... maybe this is where it changes - through the Meaning Holder mindset. Not every hard moment is a crisis. Sometimes it just looks like one. And if it doesn't serve you, you're free to choose differently.

But if you stay... stay long enough to see what the moment might be asking of you - before deciding what it means.

You and I were quick to decide. Called it bad. Called it over. Moved on before we understood it.

Maybe that's where the lesson sits. Maybe the moment isn't the problem. Maybe it's what we decide it means. What if the problem isn't the moment - but the meaning we rush to give it?

Sit with this letter, babe... and imagine the moment not being the problem.

Imagine it - just a moment. Still open. Still waiting. Not yet decided. Like a set before the scene begins. Picture giving it space before naming it negatively. Letting it breathe... before calling it strain, lack, or not enough.

Ever thought that what felt heavy between us might have been asking for our attention... not our judgment?

Consider limited resources or lack of money not as a verdict - but as something speaking. Something pointing. To a door we didn't know was there. Something we could listen to... instead of fight over.

Let it stay a little longer in the moment - long enough to hear what it's trying to show us.

And in that space... the tension loosens. Something opens. Invisible alternatives begin to form - quietly appearing where there was only one way before.

Money shifts. From weapon... to just another option.

And in that - something comes back online.

Creativity.

And what's left... is something we can shape together, with care, with attention, with choice.

How many bedrooms are there in the world? I found myself thinking about that the other day.

Picture the bedroom becoming a place where meaning doesn't rush ahead of us - but is chosen... in a language that feels like home.



Pictures, videos, comments - like they're law - deciding who we are in our relationships.

Or... you could stay here.  
 In this moment.

One that still belongs to you.  
 One that lets you decide what what you're going through means - for you... for your partner.

If I could turn back time, and have you next to me, I would choose differently.

I would take the role of a *Meaning Holder*.



I'm writing this from a one-bedroom apartment in Midrand. I hope you're reading this in a space that holds you without asking what you can afford to deserve it.

Maybe we didn't know how to stay with each other... without letting the world decide what we meant. And maybe the work now is this: For people to build something that cannot be easily priced, measured, or reduced.

I'll leave it here, love. Wherever you are, whatever you're doing - if you found the ease you always spoke about, I hope it found you gently.

It wasn't just us. Across rooms, cities, countries - people are losing each other the same way. Not because love ran out... but because couples haven't shaped a language beyond the one they accepted without question.

I've come to believe that the work for anyone who says they're in love with a person is to keep asking carefully, intentionally: *What is this moment asking us to become... if we refuse to measure each other by what we have, and instead learn to meet each other as life itself, in motion?*

If we could stay with that question long enough... I wonder what else love might still become.

I miss your goofiness, woman.

Love always,  
Thula Ziqubu



<b>Name</b>	<b>Thula Ziqubu</b>
<b>Geography</b>	<b>South Africa</b>
<b>Title</b>	<b>Income In the Bedroom</b>
<b>Format</b>	<b>Letter   12 - minute read</b>
<b>Biography</b>	Thula Ziqubu is a South African writer whose work explores the intersection of intimacy, economics, and Black domestic life. His contribution takes the form of a letter to a woman named Thandi — a meditation on what happens when income enters the bedroom. Not the abstraction of "the economy," but the lived reality of money reshaping love. He writes with devastating specificity on what policy leaves behind when it enters the home.