

'Tis the Season of Carnival

'Twas the morning of Zulu, one of many entertaining parades in NOLA. The entire city was buzzing with plans and expectations for the day. Mardi Gras was finally upon the people of New Orleans, in full swing. Everybody was ecstatic, the kids because of no school, parents because of no work; and the entire city for the food, good vibes, and the parades.

The Zulu Krewe was loading up and getting ready to hit the road. Every color in their costumes and float popping while simultaneously working together. This year, color theme was purple, yellow, and green, the colors at the heart and soul of the season. Each piece of fabric was carefully sewn together. The face paint bringing life to their expressions, even though it was a simple white paint this year.

The float was ready, now everyone waited for the tractor driver. She was what kept the float moving, literally. Her name is Eratrea, she has been driving in parades for as long as she could remember.

“Where is Eratrea, we need to rock and roll.” Don asked while looking at his phone.

“Imani said she would be here in like 15 minutes.” Called Athena.

Quick to reply Imani said, “I just got off the phone with her, so y’all need to chill. She said she round the corner gettin gas.”

Both Athena and Don muttered their “okays”. If Imani was being completely honest with herself, she had no clue where Eratrea was. She hurried into the next room to make a call.

brrrrng brrrrng

“Eratrea: Shello?”

“Imani: E, where are you?”

In a nonchalant tone she replied, “Eratrea: Woah, Mani, imma need you to take a chill pill. I’m on the way, give me like 10 minutes.”

Imani hung up in a semi-relived hurry. Eratrea got in her car and sped down Airline. She knew today was going to be long, in preparation she stopped by her mom’s house and picked up a plate of her favorite foods. Her mom had made baked Mac-&-cheese, brought fried chicken and fries from Golden Wings, and had her aunt make finger sandwiches (with turkey, ham, and roast beef). She ate while she drove, reaching the Krewe of Zulu in just five minutes.

With a relived tone Imani called to Eratrea, “Back her up rig’chere.”

Eratrea threw her thumb up, as a sign of “okay”. She slowly backed the tractor up and Imani hooked it to the front of the float and the back of the tractor. The krewe had already loaded up while waiting for Eratrea, so all that was left was to pull off.

When they arrived at the beginning of the route, they smelled all the different types of food in the air. The sound of music blasting, children laughing, and New Orleans talking made everyone feel at home. The parade was about to start.

Eratrea looked around as she drove through the beautiful streets of New Orleans. The purple, gold, and yellow decorations bringing life to the boulevards, avenues, and streets. All the people of the city gathered together, Black, white, Asian, hispanic, Arab, Indian; she thought it was such a wonderful sight. A melting pot of cultures coming together to witness the same exciting events each year. She thought to herself for a moment, contemplating which parade she would take her children to as their first but she knew one thing was for sure, Imani was going to be there too.

The sound of the police siren snapped her out of the thought. Nothing had happened, the officer just hit the button on accident. Her attention was finally caught by the fact that the parade had come to a halt. The band preceding her tractor continued to play their rendition of “Blow the Whistle”. While she listened, she looked round and saw uncles barbecuing (yes they could have been called dads but in her family “unc” was always at the grill), and mommas embarrassing their children with them old school dance moves.

To her left she heard a parade goer shout “THROW ME SOMETHING MISTER” and saw a coconut get launched into the crowd. At a *good* New Orleans parade you find out who is secretly athletic and this woman was. She cocked her arm back and caught it without missing a beat, or dropping her drink. The parade began moving.

Eratrea liked to look at the different reactions of the crowds as the floats passed. Seeing the joy light up the citizens’ faces like a summer sun. Hearing the screams of joy as young kids caught beads, on top of beads, on top of beads.

She realized it had been an excruciatingly long amount of time since she had eaten. It felt like her stomach was eating itself and being around so many grills was not helping. She smelled delicious bbq chicken, chargrilled hamburgers, semi-burnt hotdogs, and her ultimate favorite: fried chicken. Her mouth was a river at this point, her stomach a cave, and her mind a wonderland of delicacies. It crossed her mind multiple times to stop in the middle of the street, run up to a random tent, and ask for a plate but she knew that would not fair well with this overjoyed crowd.

Eratrea shook the thought from her mind and focused on the beauty of her surroundings. Her tractor was behind Golden Acres High School, their band was the most popular in every

parade they participated in. They used songs that rippled through all periods of time, including songs that came out just a couple months ago. The song they played the most was “She’s a Bad Mamma Jamma”, no matter the amount of times people heard that song, they always vibed with it. Coincidentally enough, that was next on their roster. Eratrea could see the smile appear on everyone’s face as soon as the first note rang out. She could not deny the fact that her mind was now focused on the song, which caused her to smile and forget that she was starving.

After about an hour Eratrea saw the sweet, sweet sight of the final stretch. The end of her route was near. Only a few stragglers were at the end (any New Orleans native knew the end was not the place to be). The last of it was super easy and simple, no beads were thrown. She was home free.