

Kedibone

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Creative Writing

of

Rhodes University

by

Sabata Paul Mokaie

November 2013

Abstract

A young woman from a rural village near Kimberley is killed by her husband in a fit of jealousy. Her illiterate mother is summoned to the hospital to authorize the removal of vital organs – eyes, liver, kidney and heart – for organ donation. But some members of the family feel that their child should not be buried with parts of her body missing. Thus begins a story that changes the lives of many people, both black and white, over the following twenty years.

Kedibone

Part 1

A layer of smog formed just metres above the corrugated iron roofs of matchbox houses in Galeshewe, clothing the township in a dark blue cloud. Anything that could be burned to heat up water, brew the morning tea and make the houses warm was used - from coal to tree branches to dry items from rubbish bins. The smell never mattered.

It was a winter morning in this Godforsaken place on the outskirts of Kimberley, the city that found its fame when the world raced to it in search of diamonds in the nineteenth century. It was like any other South African township.

Children rushed to school in their varied clean, ironed uniforms with rucksacks on their backs. Men dressed in overalls of various colours, others in shirts and ties, some in retail uniforms, rushed to catch the municipal buses that seemed never to be in a good mood. Some jumped onto the few minibus taxis that ferried people all day from home to town and back.

Women, in their pure white hospital uniforms, domestics with pinafores in their handbags, waitresses and cashiers attired in various uniforms also wrestled for their space in the queues at the bus stop.

A little further in the suburb of Hadison Park, Larry Pickover walked slowly to the gate to fetch the newspaper tagged to the post box. Since his retirement, this English and history teacher whiled away time reading the Diamond Fields Advertiser, underlining and circling spelling mistakes and grammatical errors with his red pen.

He would then write long letters to the editor, complaining about the declining standards of journalism and non-adherence to journalistic ethics. After that he would visit his neighbours and converse on what he read.

He read his newspaper sitting under the carport, always in the same position with a cup of Five Roses tea next to him. He did this every day around seven o'clock except when it rained or was very cold. Had it not been for a change of clothes, passersby would easily have mistaken him for a piece of art.

But back to the Galeshewe Township in the morning; it's usually choc-a-bloc, a rush to get to *baas* who's always ready to get you replaced by another desperate job seeker should you turn up late. Work was scarce and you held on to what you had. Otherwise your children would starve.

Galeshewe also had the same history as any other township in South Africa: set up as a labour reserve on the outskirts of the city and the industrial zone, it was a village for exclusive habitation by Africans under the administration of the Department of Native Affairs. It also lacked the basic amenities. In some parts of the township, or the location as some called it, on a particular day of the week, a tractor pulling a yellow tank would come and men in blue overalls would empty toilet buckets. Cops in a yellow pick-up, dubbed

‘mellow yellow’ or a *kwela* van, meaning ‘jump in’ by the locals, patrolled the streets day and night.

Morning conversations at the bus stop often began with what people had heard on the current affairs programme on Radio Tswana, a government radio station staffed mainly by former teachers and set up to serve the Setswana-speaking communities in South Africa.

Enlightened ones in the queue would buy copies of the local newspaper, the Diamond Fields Advertiser, before arriving at work. They often read the paper during tea-time or before they started duty. These were often the clerks, *bo-mabalane*, those who worked with pens and paper. Others would not care about the news, the municipal bus boycotts or the imminent visit to the city of Kimberley by the State President.

They wanted to get to work, do what they were ordered to do, go back home and get paid at the end of the fortnight or month-end, whatever the case may be. They were simply part of a wheel that kept turning. That’s all they were – good citizens. They wanted no trouble. They wanted their children to have a roof over their heads, eat, be clothed, go to school and maybe one day be released from the bondage of poverty.

Among these was Matlholaadibona Mosadiwatlala, a dairy worker in his thirties who dropped out of high school when his father died while working at the De Beers Consolidated Mines. He had to leave school to take care of his mother and niece, whose mother also died shortly after labour.

At first he tried going to night school to keep his dream of becoming a teacher alive, but later gave up. Since then, he would never go to bed sober. His mother gave up trying to talk sense into him. She eventually prayed for him to leave the bottle alone. He never did. She also never ceased praying for him. He was her only son, her only child who was still living at home apart from the granddaughter whose father she didn’t know.

Then one day when he came home from work, Matlholaadibona told his mother that Diego Da Silva, a Portuguese restaurateur in town to whom he delivered milk every morning, needed an extra pair hands in busy times such as Easter and Christmas seasons. He thought his niece, Kedibone, could take up the offer and earn some money during school holidays. This was not something they would even think about.

Kedibone was seventeen when she started working at Da Silva’s Food Corner. Being an orphan, she hardly had any small change to purchase hair relaxant like all girls her age. Her grandmother told her that she had to take the offer so that she could be able to purchase hair relaxant, roll-on deodorant and proper sanitary towels, and be like other girls in the township.

“That piece of cloth you use when you are on your days is harsh and will eventually hurt you,” her grandmother, MmaMosadiwatlala, would say.

“Your mother died at a very young age, my child. We don’t know who your father is or was. Maybe he lives in this neighbourhood and he sees you every time you go to school or when

we send you to the shops. Anyway, I must shut up about that irresponsible son of the devil. God will answer for you one day,” the old woman said, shrugging her shoulders.

Kedibone had to learn that she was on her own. Having no mother and not sure who her father was, she also had no siblings. All that she knew was that she had an uncle and a grandmother whose days on earth were also numbered and that sooner or later she had to find her way in life.

Her grandmother’s old age pension was barely enough to keep the wolf at bay for a month. While working at the restaurant during school holidays, she was able to augment her granny’s meagre pension.

She earned enough to buy sanitary towels to last until the next holiday season when she would be back at the restaurant. She could even buy hair relaxant and moisturiser, roll-on deodorant and an odd pair of jeans and a blouse from Sales House or Bee Gees and began to look like other girls in Galeshewe Township. Boys even started paying attention to her. But she rejected their advances.

It was nearing the end of the Christmas season and Kedibone had been working at Da Silva’s Food Corner on and off since Good Friday when she came home later than usual one night.

She proceeded straight to her grandmother’s dim-lit bedroom and handed her a stack of ten rand notes. Without a word she turned around and went to the children’s bedroom, which had become hers since all the other grandchildren had left because they were already grown up and were either working out of town, were married or living on their own.

The old woman could sense that something was wrong.

“Kedi, are you crying? What is wrong? And since you are only getting paid next week, where do you get this money from?”

Kedibone sobbed and said nothing.

In the middle of the night, the old woman could hear the sound of the movement of water. It was as if somebody was taking a bath. She woke up and went to the children’s bedroom only to find the stark-naked Kedibone standing in a washing basin.

“Why are you bathing at night, my child? What’s wrong? Say something. Please. I am your grandmother. You can trust me.”

It was as if the grandmother had told her to cry more. Tears flowed down her cheeks as if sluice gates had been opened.

She cried loudly, clenched her fists and moved her hands as if she was crying for revenge.

Her grandmother went closer, handed her a gown to cover her body and hugged her to calm her down.

“Tell me, my child. What happened?”

Kedibone took her wet facecloth, wiped her face and began relating the ordeal.

“He raped me, grandma. He raped me.”

“Oh, my God! Who did such a terrible thing, my child? Who did that?”

“It’s Emmanuel, Diego’s son.”

“The one who often drops you here in a red car after work?” the old woman asked.

“Yes, grandma. He raped me.”

Kedibone started to relate the ordeal to her grandmother.

Although she was surprised, Kedibone suspected nothing when Emmanuel asked her to remain behind when all other workers were taken home.

“I’d like you to help me count the money,” he said.

She agreed.

“Maybe he’s beginning to trust me,” she thought.

He switched off the lights in the eating area, the kiosk, the kitchen and the garage. Only the small office where his father usually sat remained lit.

“Don’t worry. I’ll take you home. It’s just that today my father left early, leaving this task for me. I’m too tired. I need another set of eyes,” Emmanuel said.

She believed him. Anyway, it would not be for the first time that he would be driving into Galeshewe Township. He often dropped off workers at bus stops nearer to their homes.

He closed all the doors.

They started counting the money; separating the coins from the notes, putting each denomination in separate plastic bags and before writing down the amounts on a notepad.

“Here,” he handed over a stack of ten rand notes to her.

“What is it for?” Kedibone asked.

“Just take it. I am thanking you.”

“You are thanking me for what?”

“Just take the money, Kedi. That’s all I can say. Stop asking so many questions,” he said, leaving her standing there in pleasant surprise.

“I’ll take you home when I come back from the bathroom.”

Kedibone was still in front of the table, counting the ten rand notes that he gave to her when Emmanuel grabbed her from behind.

“What are you doing?” she asked, pushing his hand away.

“I know you like me,” he said.

“Yes, I like you. But not in that way. Please don’t do that.”

Emmanuel kept quiet. He pushed her towards the wall.

“Emmanuel, please.”

“We’re just having fun, Kedi.”

“What fun? I don’t like this.”

He placed his forefinger on her lips and his other hand went down to her left upper leg.

“What are you doing?”

She could not believe it when his hand went underneath her skirt, moved his hand up and down her thigh, eventually pulling down her panties.

“Emmanuel, are you crazy?”

“Just keep quiet, Kedi. Keep quiet,” he said, jaws clenched, voice firm and low.

She froze. She had never been touched that way before.

She tried to push him away but the amateur rugby player remained where was, moving only as and when he wished.

His index finger went underneath her panties, snaking through to her vagina.

“Emmanuel, stop it. I’m begging you. Please stop it.”

He pulled out his finger from her vagina, pushing her legs apart with his.

Tears swelled her eyes.

“What are you doing? Please let me go,” she begged, her voice weakening.

He pushed her down to the floor. She tried to fight him off but it was all in vain. He pushed her legs apart again.

He shoved his finger into her vagina.

“Emmanuel, please don’t do that. I am begging you,” her voice was so weak, almost whispering.

“I’m begging you. Please let me go.”

He unzipped his trousers with one hand and held her down to the floor with another.

Kedibone called her late mother - “*Ijoo mma, wee.*”

He put his hand on her mouth.

She could not scream. She could not move. She no longer resisted. She closed her eyes and allowed everything to take place.

He pushed his erect penis around, looking for the entrance to her vagina. She felt it moving around, and went it in with haste.

She cried silently. No sound. Just tears.

Not even her breathing made a sound, just his bellowing when he came.

Once he had done what he wanted to do, he stood up, zipped his trousers, dipped a hand in his pocket, took out another stack of ten rand notes and gave it to her. She pushed his hand away. He threw it at her and went to the toilet. She counted the notes. It was two hundred rand. She put it in her bra, wiped her thighs with a handkerchief and went to the toilet.

She had been in the toilet for not longer than a minute when he called her.

“Come on, Kedibone. Let’s go. It’s getting late. I want to sleep.”

“Voetsek,” she screamed. *Go away.*

She came holding a roll of toilet paper in her hand and followed him to the Ford Cortina that was parked behind the restaurant.

The trip that usually took fifteen minutes felt much longer that night. Kedibone could hear all the sounds the car made when it pulled off from the intersections, when it picked up speed and when it slowed down. She could hear when it was in first, second, third and last gear. It was as if the whole trip took place inside her skull.

All that time she wished she could give the car wings, let it fly and drop her at her grandmother’s matchbox house. But the driver carried on forever. All she wanted was to get out the car.

At last they arrived. He tried to force a smile.

“I’ll see you tomorrow. Goodnight.”

She said nothing, got out of the car, banged the door and headed straight to the back door of grandmother’s house, which was always kept unlocked until everybody was in.

Kedibone thought she was dreaming when her grandmother took out a handkerchief to wipe a tear.

“Slaap, my kind,” she said. *Sleep, my child.*

“We will figure out what to do when we wake up in the morning.”

Kedibone’s eyes were wide open throughout the night. The whole thing was playing itself again and again in her mind like bioscope, and every time it would seem more real than the last time.

She could even sense his smell, hear his hurried breathing. She could hear herself begging him to stop. She could remember the first thrust, and how violent it was and how disgusted, dirtied, violated, betrayed and powerless she felt.

Kedibone was so wide awake she could even hear the voices of people leaving the township for work at ungodly hours.

She also heard when Tebatso, their backroom boarder, took his girlfriend to her home very early before her grandmother woke up.

She eventually fell asleep on top of the blankets. She was woken up by her grandmother with a cup of coffee.

“*My kind, you’ll catch flu. Why are you not wearing anything?*” MmaMosadiwatlala asked.

She put coffee on the dressing table and moved closer to Kedibone.

“All shall be well. I am very sorry you have to go through this. It shall pass, my child. That dog shall have his day. My mother can hear me from the grave.”

Tears started flowing again.

“I’m sorry, grandma. I don’t know what to say or do. I’m really sorry. Maybe I could have left when everybody left,” Kedibone said, covering herself with a *donkey*, a cheap grey-and-white blanket.

“No, it is not your fault. I can see that boy has hurt you. His father will know me tomorrow, *ek sê vir jou.*”

Kedibone stood up and looked out through the window. It was still dark outside. The moon and the stars shone very bright. Up in the sky she saw *mphatthalatsane*, the bright morning star that outshone all other stars and was always the last to disappear to give way to the sun. She remembered the folktales her grandmother used to narrate to her about *mphatthalatsane*.

Those were the days of innocence. Now Emmanuel had violently taken that innocence away. She didn’t give it to him. He took away it without asking. He took it away because he could. He took it because he had the money to get him out of trouble. It’s a rotten world this one.

“Grandma you can go back to sleep. This coffee must be cold already. I’ll make another one and bring to you.”

Matlholaadibona was woken from slumber by Kedibone and his mother’s conversation in the middle of the night.

“Goodness! I had a long and tiring day at the dairy. *Mma*, it’s almost four o’clock and you and your granddaughter are holding a conference. I’m supposed to be awake at half past five. Can’t you give me some peace?”

“*Askies, my kind*. I wasn’t aware that our voices were that high to wake you up,” the old woman said to her son.

“But now that you’re already up, maybe as Kedibone’s uncle and the only man in this house, you better come here because something very bad happened to your niece.”

Matlholaadibona made his way to children’s bedroom, finding the two women seated on the bed.

“Your niece arrived from work last night and never slept. She’s been crying the whole night,” she said.

“Molato ke eng?” he asked. *What’s the matter?*

“There is a big problem, my son.”

Turning his head towards Kedibone, he asked “Have you started seeing boys? I have warned you about being out in the township streets at night.”

The old woman interjected.

“Matlholaadibona, wait. This poor girl was kept against her will at work after others were sent home and then the son of the restaurant owner raped her.”

Tears started streaming down Kedibone’s face. Her grandmother hugged her.

“*Mma*, what are you saying? My blood is boiling already! Ek gaan daai hond doodmaak,” Matlholaadibona screamed. *I’m going to kill that dog*.

“Wait, my child. Fighting fire with fire will not help us. You don’t want to end in jail. And even if we take that boy to the police he’ll get away with it because his father has money for the lawyers. Poor people like us are at simply at God’s mercy, my child,” she said.

“*Mma*, are you saying that the bastard must now rape my niece and I must just let it go? Is that what you’re saying?”

“Don’t raise your voice, Matlholaadibona. We don’t have to wake up the neighbours. What I’m saying is that we need to make them pay. Right now my daughter’s daughter’ is hurt. She is deflowered in a way no girl must be deflowered. The dignity of my household has been

brought down. My husband must be turning in his grave. But I'm saying that we can't act out of emotions because it won't help us in the end."

Matlholaadibona had a habit of stroking his beard when thinking hard.

"I hear you, *mma*. Now what are you saying? What must we do now?" he asked.

"Try to leave the house and pass by those people's shop. I know that the Portuguese man opens his shops early. Tell him that we know what happened last night and we are going to the police. Explain to him that according to our customs, adults report children to their parents first for their misdemeanours before they pass them on to the people of the law," MmaMosadiwatlala said.

"But, where does the payment come in, *mma*? You just said we can't take them to the police," he said.

"I don't think they want to be embarrassed. I think they'll want to shut us up with money. That's why I'm saying we'll pass there to let them know that we are going to the police."

"I get the picture. But if I got my way, I'd beat that boy until he forgets the name of the person who gave birth to him!"

By seven o'clock Kedibone's grandmother was already dressed up and ready to go to town.

"That Portuguese man will pay. My grandchild has never been with a man before. It is not right that she must be deflowered so violently. That Portuguese man must pay. He has the money," the old woman said to herself.

She had the habit of saying her thoughts out loud and letting out the steam when she was not aware that someone might be listening.

"Grandma, what are you saying? Is that why you did not want me to go to the police last night, that you should get money from them?" she was almost crying when she asked.

"My child, you must understand that even if we go to the police, that dog will not go to prison. You are only going to embarrass yourself by telling the whole Galeshewe Township what that monster did to you. They are going to know everything, *ek sê vir jou*," the grandmother said.

"Grandma, are you saying that making them pay is the only thing that can make them feel some pain? What about me? This is not easy for me."

"Kedi, I understand. But life is hard, *my kind*. You also know that I cannot even afford to buy sanitary towels for you. At least during school holidays you spend your days there and have a meal. What will you eat here all the school holidays if you are not going there?"

She stared at Kedibone, who in turn said nothing.

“My child, this world does many bad things to girls and women. Almost every woman that you know has a lot of bad and painful things done to her by a man. They did not run to the police. This is a burden all women must bear. If you take this Portuguese boy to the police, you will take almost every man there and eventually nobody will marry you. Listen to me, *my kind*, in this world women carry deep scars in their hearts. This is just the beginning. You are still going to see the worst in this world.”

The old woman’s words, however twisted Kedibone thought of them, were beginning to sink in.

“This is just the beginning. You are still going to see the worst in this world.”

These words kept on repeating themselves in Kedibone’s head.

She started thinking about what might happen if she went to the police. She thought of losing the holiday piece-job and the embarrassment to the whole family if the whole township was to know all the details of what happened last night.

Her grandmother’s words kept hammering at the inside of her skull. But her resolve to see the bastard pay dearly conflicted with what the old woman said to be the reality of a woman’s life.

The poor girl fought with the cold and harsh realities of her life. She thought about what happened to the girls that were rumoured to have been raped. She thought of the women her grandmother spoke about.

“Almost every woman that you know has been violated by a man,” the words continued to beg for her acceptance.

“I cannot let that dog get away with raping me just because his family is rich,” she said to herself.

She sat there and said nothing. What spoke the loudest were the tears that fell on the tablecloth as she listened to her grandmother even though she could hardly hear a word of what she was saying.

The old woman, for the first time in her life, could not figure out the message in her granddaughter’s silence, or even in her eyes.

The pair was quiet. The walls said nothing either. Only a falling pin might have cut short the silence.

Eventually Kedibone stood up and went to her to her bedroom. After an hour when she emerged from the bedroom she was wearing bright red slacks and white tunic, with her hair combed and had lipstick on.

“Let’s go, grandma.”

There was always a waitress at the door of the Da Silva's Food Corner.

Dressed in a bright orange top and black skirt, she greeted Kedibone and her grandmother.

"Girl, you don't look like you're reporting for duty. Not in those clothes! Tell me something. What's happening?" asked Catherine, also a known chatterbox among the waitresses.

Kedibone greeted her, ignoring her question.

She pulled her grandmother by the hand, heading towards the small office at the back.

Diego Da Silva was almost falling asleep when they knocked on an already open door.

"Come on in," he said, pointing towards the two seats in front of the desk.

Extending a hand, he said "You must be Kedi's mother."

"Good morning, Mister Da Silva. No. I'm her grandmother," MmaMosadiwatlala said.

"I'm terribly sorry to meet you for the first time under these bad circumstances. But what can we do? Children are children. They will throw you in soup, I'm telling you," he said, trying a smile amid heavy breathing.

"My granddaughter did nothing wrong, Mister Da Silva. Your son raped her. Don't say children. Talk about your child."

"Okay. My child has put me in this, Mrs Mosadi. But I have a proposal."

"My surname is Mosadiwatlala."

She looked at Kedibone.

"Must she write it down for you?" she asked.

"*Nnyaa, mma*. It won't be necessary. I got it right now, Mrs Mosadiwatlala."

The old woman burst with laughter.

"God help us! A Portuguese man suddenly utters two words in my language! He, he, he!"

Kedibone gave her a look. Then abrupt silence followed. Diego carried on where he left.

"As I said, I have a proposal. As I said that children are children and you never know what they are going to do next, this thing that happened last night was totally unexpected. I have always thought that Kedi and Emmanuel are good buddies, you see?"

"I hear what you are saying, Mister Da Silva. But the things you are saying are not new to my ears. I'm an old woman. I may even be old enough to be your mother. I have seen many incidents like this one. I have come to you with my grandchild because you are a parent. I want to let you know, as a parent, that we are on our way to the police station," the old woman said.

“Oh, just hold there, *ouma*.”

“I’m not done yet, Mister Da Silva. *Ons is op pad*. We are going to lay a charge of rape against your son. I did not come here to ask for your permission to go to the police. I came here to let you know that I’m handing over your child to the law. That’s how my people do things. Adults don’t hand children over to the law without telling their parents,” the old woman said, banging the table.

“Mrs Mosadiwatlala, I think there is a way this matter can be solved without involving the police. Please, ma’am. Let’s talk as adults and see if we can’t find a solution. Please, ma’am, I’m begging you,” he asked, hands on hands on the table, put together as in a prayer.

“What are you actually saying, Mister Da Silva?” the old woman asked.

“What if I compensate you? I don’t mean to say that your granddaughter’s pain is worth any price, but what else can a parent in my situation do?”

The shoulders he shrugged were almost invisible in a body covered in a mass of fat.

“Believe me, *ouma*. If I could turn back the hands of time I could make last night disappear completely. But I can’t. All I’m pleading for is that we find some understanding.”

He pulled the drawer and brought out a brown envelope. He put it on the table.

“There is thirty thousand rand inside this envelope. You can take it and let this incident be forgotten. *Asseblief, ouma*. I know it’s not easy to forget about something like this, but this is the little I can do.”

MmaMosadiwatlala looked at Kedibone.

“A re ye go bua kwa ntle, ngwanake,” she said to her granddaughter. *Let’s go and talk outside, my child*.

“You don’t need go outside. How much time do you need? I can leave the two of you here. Let me get someone to prepare a meal while I run to the other shop. Don’t worry, it’s on the house. I’ll be back in half an hour,” Diego said, standing up to leave the room.

The small office sighed with relief when that whale of a man exited.

“Now what are you saying, Kedi? With that kind of money we can start a new life,” the old woman said.

“Whatever you decide it’s fine with me, grandma,” Kedibone said.

Catherine came in with a menu.

“Kedi, you’re important today. What’s happening? Are you marrying Emmanuel? Why is everyone so quiet?” she asked.

She ignored her, focusing rather on the menu.

“Cathy, you can give us today’s special? My grandmother likes Coca Cola. You can make it two. Please stop asking so many questions,” Kedibone said.

Her grandmother looked at the brown envelope on the table. It was sealed.

“How do we know there is real money inside?” she asked

“If we take the money, we’ll have to open the envelope and count it. He said it is thirty thousand rand. I think it is little, grandma. He must increase it.”

The old woman’s jaw almost dropped.

“Are you mad? I have never touched more than one thousand rand with my hands in my life and you are saying thirty thousand is little? You must be mad, little girl!”

“*Oumama*, to us thirty thousand rand is a lot of money but to this family it’s nothing. Otherwise they wouldn’t have offered it. They have offered us what they can afford. We must stretch so that they can feel the pain,” Kedibone said.

“I hear you, my child. But this thing of asking for more is making me uncomfortable.”

“*Oumama*, but this was your idea. I wanted to go to the police. All I’m saying is that I have gone through a lot of pain. What if Emmanuel has always been doing this to other girls and this is how they always get away with it?”

“So, how much more do you want?” the old woman asked.

“Let’s say we want thirty-five thousand rand, grandma. If they don’t agree, we’ll tell them we’re going to the police station now.”

Catherine arrived with the food and the drinks.

Diego came in just when they started eating.

“Sorry I took a little bit longer than anticipated. I found health inspectors at the other shop. I think the guy who runs a shop next door must have set them on me. But it was a small matter. They always want bribes. Easy.”

He pulled a chair.

“So, what’s the verdict?” he asked the old woman.

“We agree to your proposal but we think your offer is little, Mister Da Silva. We want thirty-five thousand.”

“What?”

“*Jy het my gehoor*,” she said. *You heard me.*

He looked at Kedibone. Her eyes were fixed on the right side of the small office, where there are no cabinets or anything. That's probably where the rape took place the previous night. He could not be too sure. He didn't ask the night-watchman many questions.

He looked at the old woman again.

“Did she take a bath last night or this morning before coming here? I see she looks and smells good.”

“No. She did not take a bath, Mister Da Silva. She only wiped her face, combed her hair and put on clean clothes,” the grandmother said.

“I'll give you the money on one condition.”

“And what is the condition?”

“I don't want to see her in my restaurant again. She must not even come here to buy food. Do we agree on that one?”

“My granddaughter did not rape herself, Mister Da Silva.”

“I said repeatedly that I'm sorry about what happened, *ouma*. Unfortunately none of us can change what has already happened. But that's my condition, *ouma*.”

“That's fine.”

He opened the envelope that had been on the table for a while and started counting the money.

“It's thirty thousand rand here. Are you satisfied?” he asked.

“Yes. It is thirty thousand. Where is the other five thousand?”

He pulled the drawer and brought out more bank notes. He started counting. He counted up to five thousand rand. He put it in the envelope as well. The rest he put back in the drawer.

“There is your money. I just want you to know that this money is enough to buy me a brand new car,” he said.

“Then teach your son manners, Mister Da Silva.”

The old woman took the envelope and put it in her bag.

She gave Kedibone a handkerchief.

“Wipe your tears, my child. Let's get out of this dirty place.”

He rose to give her a handshake.

She ignored his hand.

“Goodbye, Mister Da Silva,” she said.

“It was nice doing business with you, *ouma*.”

MmaMosadiwatlala had just arrived one afternoon from the Thursday Methodist Church women’s prayer meeting, when she found Kedibone crying in her bedroom.

She went to sit next to her, holding her left hand in her right hand.

“My child, I know it’s hard after what that Portuguese boy has done to you. I wish I could do something more to help you. I wish I could carry your pain.”

The sun was nearing the western horizon.

“Don’t you have homework to do?” she asked.

“I have some homework, grandma. But I must still wash uncle’s overalls. I spilled coffee on the clean ones by mistake. He’ll be angry when he gets here and find that it’s still dirty.”

The old woman looked at the white overalls in the washing basin, and then at the wall clock.

“I think you must do your homework. I’ll wash these overalls. They should dry up quickly. It’s still windy outside.”

Kedibone admired her grandmother’s strength. At the age of sixty-three she still got around to do some house chores without complaining. She woke up earlier than many people in the neighbourhood. She was always neat. She hated staying in a dirty house.

“If you walk around in clean clothes and your hair is nicely combed, then your house must be spick and span too. No man will marry a woman who cannot keep her house clean,” the old woman often said.

Thursdays and Sundays were her best days.

On these days, especially Sundays, the old woman cooked the meal township folks called *colour film*. This is usually white rice, some meat and a variety of vegetables. These vegetables would be different colours, hence *colour film*. So they would include beetroot, pumpkin, potatoes, carrots and spinach. The meal was often not without mayonnaise, tomato sauce or chutney. In most cases families would gather at the table to eat together at lunch time. That would likely be the only time they used fork and knife to eat.

After waking up early to clean the house as if to receive visitors from faraway places and cooking, the old woman would then bathe for a long time in big washing basin before emerging from her bedroom proudly in her red and white church regalia. She would never go to church in ordinary clothes. Not even on a day of heavy rains. She was the woman of prayer, and the red and white made all the difference.

When MmaMosadiwatlala got out of the gate, with a Bible and hymn books on one hand a *beat* on the other hand, many people in the neighbourhood looked at her with admiration, some with eyes full of envy. She was a feature in the township.

A *beat* was a leather pillow, in most cases brown in colour and usually small enough to be held by the hand. Church members “beat” it alongside the clapping of hands when they sing hymns to add rhythm.

Kedibone’s grandmother had been a member of the Methodist Church women’s movement, the *manyano*, since she was old enough to exit the Wesley Guild, the church’s youth wing.

She had since handed over the blue and white Wesley Guild uniform, along with the countless T-shirts bearing the faded message “One Heart One Way,” to her granddaughter.

Only her son disappointed her. Days when he went to church, she knew he badly wanted something from her. Otherwise he flatly refused. He took to drinking from an early age. It was only after a six-month stay in jail for robbing a Catholic priest that he tried to reform himself and went back to high school to continue doing Form Three. Teachers and other pupils taunted him for being an old crock in the class.

He eventually dropped out and found a piece-job in the dairy in town. He donned the white overalls and white gumboots every day at work. He ate porridge and milk for lunch. He brought cheese and coffee creamer home every evening when he knocked off. They eventually hired him on a permanent basis. He never left the dairy.

Kedibone was always grateful for the grandmother she had. The poor girl had never known her mother, the mother she was told died soon after giving birth to her.

It had been two months she was violated by Emmanuel. It had also been two months since her grandmother had been by her bedside until she fell asleep. Every morning she’d hear her grandmother tell her uncle, Matlholaadibona, not to go to the Portuguese restaurant and cause a fight.

“Our child has been deflowered in a manner that hurt us deeply. But they have paid us the damages. Please don’t go there and fight with them.”

The uncle never went.

But Kedibone heard that one day her uncle met Emmanuel at OK Bazaar in town and slapped him. It was one loud slap. People watched in horror. The manager called the police but Emmanuel just told them to let him go.

“Your uncle stood there. He said nothing. Emmanuel had turned pink but also said nothing. The police came and all Emmanuel said was that he wanted to go home. One policeman wanted to arrest your uncle. Emmanuel said he was not going to press charges and he was not going to make a statement. The store manager told your uncle to leave,” they told Kedibone at the Wesley Guild meeting.

Kedibone's grandmother decided that the money the family received from the Portuguese family should be used to build a house in Dikhudung village. She was born and grew up there. She came to Galeshewe Township when she married. After her husband died while he was working at the De Beers Consolidated Mines, she wanted to return to the village. At that time her late husband's payout was not enough to build even a three-roomed house. It was sixteen thousand rand. She used one thousand to pay all their debts and invested the rest at Barclays Bank without any idea of when she would withdraw it.

"My child, we can now return to our real home. This township has many strange behaviours and rules. In the village we can keep the sheep and the goats. We can also cultivate vegetables because yards are bigger there. We can survive with my pension because we will not have to pay rent."

It was already dark when MmaMosadiwatlala and her neighbour, MmaBaard, got off the municipal bus in Hulana Street on their way back home since they left around eleven o'clock when they went to the Thursday women's prayer meeting at the Methodist Church.

While they were still long, these meetings were also followed by visiting the sick at their homes or in hospital. The women of the *manyano* would often split into groups, depending on the number of the sick that needed to be prayed for and where they were. Sometimes they even brought them food and toiletries.

On that particular Thursday, MmaMosadiwatlala and MmaBaard decided to go to the hospital in town because their neighbour's teenage son had been admitted after being beaten to near death by police officers for loitering in Hadison Park, a white suburb on a Sunday afternoon without an explanation.

"*Ijoo*, MmaBaard. I still can't believe those policemen can beat up a person for just walking. *Sies, man!* The poor boy had not stolen a thing. Have you seen how bad his face looks," MmaMosadiwatlala asked.

"It's a shame, my friend. The sad thing is that he said the white policeman stood there and laughed while the two black policemen from our location beat him up. Why did they do that? To show the white man what they can do to their own," said MmaBaard, spitting on the ground.

"What hurt me, *wena* MmaBaard, is that these policemen are the same children we raised in the location. Now they behave like possessed predators out to maim and kill at any given opportunity."

"No wonder they burn their houses and drive them out of the location in the middle of the night in winter like a pack of dogs," MmaBaard added.

“The only thing we can do now is to keep praying that God hears our prayers that one day Nelson Mandela comes out of prison to lead this country. Maybe we’ll no longer have to hear about our husbands and children being killed by the policemen for just walking,” MmaMosadiwatlala said.

The two women were approaching their homes, their red and white uniforms bright under the giant Apollo light. Children were still playing outside the yards, their parents also streaming into their homes from work. Minibus taxis were hooting, dropping off passengers.

“*Mosadi*, I’m getting worried,” MmaMosadiwatlala said, leaning on the gate.

“You remember about the incident with the Portuguese boy two months ago?”

“Yes. I remember. How is Kedi coping,” MmaBaard asked.

“She still prefers to stay alone in the bedroom. Last weekend we went to Pages to buy her some new clothes. She also went to perm her hair. I then gave her some money to visit my sister in Alexandra. But she is still not getting better. She still cries at night.”

“It’s going to take time, my friend. Rape causes more pain inside than outside and the pain inside takes much longer to heal. Sometimes the pain inside does not heal at all,” MmaBaard said.

“I know, *mosadi*. But I have a bigger worry. Ke belaela gore Kedi o robegile leoto,” she said, almost whispering. *I suspect that my granddaughter might be pregnant.*

“You don’t say! What makes you suspect that?” MmaBaard asked.

“Yesterday morning I found a wet patch of soil just when I went out to water my flowers. At a closer look I realised that someone might have thrown up and covered with soil. There are only three people in my house, *mosadi*. It’s not me. It can only be Matlholaadibona or Kedibone. Having been through what she’s been through, she’s the likeliest one. I’m getting scared.”

MmaBaard held her friend’s hand.

“I’ll pray for all of us tonight. If she is that way, then God help us. I don’t know what’s going to happen. We must just take it all to God in prayer.”

Matlholaadibona was not used to his mother waking up around half past five in the morning.

“*Mma*, why are you up so early?” he asked.

“I have to go and see MmaPico before she goes to work.”

MmaPico was a member of the burial society and nurse at the Kimberley Hospital. She was almost as old as MmaMosadiwatlala, nearing retirement. She had assisted in delivering most children in the township.

“Ke ngwanake yo,” she would say every time she meets a child whose mother she remembered assisting during labour. *This one is my child.*

Most of her neighbours often sought her advice on health matters before they could see a doctor.

“There is no need to wake this early. I can take your burial society contribution to her, *mma*. Or are you in need of some pain pills?”

“No. I’m not sick,” she said, lowering her voice.

“I think there might be something wrong with your niece.”

“You mean?” Matlholaadibona asked, moving his right hand above his stomach.

“I think so. Let’s pray it’s just my suspicion, *ngwanake*. If it’s like that, what are we going to do?”

“My God, I don’t know what we’ll do,” he said, buttoning his overalls.

“This suspicion is eating me inside, but it’s time we face the reality. If she’s like that, we must figure out what to do. But we can’t live with suspicions for too long.”

The old woman reached for the door.

“Have a good day, *ngwanake*. Please don’t say a word to your niece,” she bid him goodbye.

MmaPico lived just a block away from MmaMosadiwatlala’s house. At that time of the morning, the streets in Galeshewe were already busy with people going to work.

A police van passed her at high speed.

“Can’t these people think for a moment that they could hit a person walking in the street?” she thought.

She was not aware that the police van was followed by an ambulance, also in a hurry.

“Ao Modimo wa me. A mongwe o tlhabilwe ka thipa gape?” she asked herself, not aware that she was talking loudly. *Oh, my God. Have they stabbed another one?*

She walked faster, lest she found MmaPico already gone.

Fortunately, she found her right at the door, ready to leave.

“Dumela, *mma*,” MmaMosadiwatlala greeted.

“Morning, MmaMosadiwatlala. I know that when any of my neighbours comes to my house at this time there must be a problem. But you found me already on my way to work,” MmaPico said.

MmaMosadiwatlala decided to walk with MmaPico to the bus stop.

“I’m sure you have heard that my granddaughter was recently raped by a Portuguese boy in town,” she said.

“Nothing stays private in this township, *mosadi*. I have long heard about that. How is Kedi coping? I hardly see her these days.”

“She cries most of the time. She still prefers to stay alone in the bedroom and she does not talk much,” MmaMosadiwatlala said.

They upped their pace.

“But the reason I wanted to see you is that I suspect that the Portuguese boy might have left her with a bun in the oven.”

“Oh my God, you don’t say!”

“*Ee, mosadi*. Otherwise I would have woken up so early to come and see you. What bothers me is that the situation she is in does not make it easy for me to simply ask her to come with me to the clinic,” MmaMosadiwatlala said.

“Yes. The poor thing is very fragile. She is probably confused. I’ll figure out a way around this. Let me pass by your house when I come back from work tonight.”

They reached the bus stop almost at the same time as the bus.

“Let’s meet tonight. Have a good day,” MmaMosadiwatlala greeted Mmapico, who climbed into the municipal bus.

When MmaPico returned from work that evening she passed by the Mosadiwatlala household to ask if she could go with Kedibone to the hospital tomorrow morning.

“I just want to check if that Portuguese boy did not leave you with any disease, my girl,” she said to her.

Kedibone agreed.

By half past six the next morning Kedibone was all dressed up, waiting to hear MmaPico calling “Kedi” with her soprano outside the gate.

In no time the impeccably dressed nurse was walking side by side with Kedibone to the bus stop.

Kedibone realised by the way other nurses, clerks, security officers and even doctors, black and white, greeted and addressed MmaPico, that she was some sort of a matriarch at the hospital.

“Martha, please take this girl for tests. She was recently raped and no tests were done on her after that. Please do all the necessary tests and bring her back to me?” she asked a younger nurse.

Kedibone was taken through a myriad of tests; blood and urine samples taken and forms filled. The young nurse later took her back to MmaPico, who was sitting in an office that looked very neat though she was surrounded by files and forms, filled and blank.

She reached for her handbag, took out a ten rand note and handed it to Kedibone.

“My child, go home. I’ll bring the test results tonight when I knock off.”

In the evening when MmaMosadiwatlala heard someone knocking on the door, she knew it was MmaPico. She had been waiting for her since seven o’clock.

“Dumelang, bagaetsho. A lo tlhotse?” she greeted. *Good evening. How was your day?*

“We had a good day except that waiting is not a good feeling,” MmaMosadiwatlala replied.

She called Kedibone and asked her to make tea for them.

“It’s not advisable for you to call her. In fact I want us to talk in privacy,” MmaPico said, raising her left hand.

The two women decided to walk to MmaPico’s house, just a stone’s throw away.

“*Mosadi*, we did all the tests on your grandchild this morning and I wish I had good news for you,” MmaPico said.

“Oh, holy God! Am I going to be strong enough for this?”

“You just have to be strong, *mosadi*. God never forsakes us in times like these.”

MmaPico pushed open the gate for them to enter.

“I can’t believe this boy is not at home at this time of the night,” she said, referring to her only son, Lesego.

The two women sat down. MmaPico went to the kitchen and came back with two cups of tea.

“*Mosadi*, firstly the good news is that the Portuguese boy did not leave Kedi with any disease. I think for that we must thank God.”

MmaMosadiwatlala just nodded and sipped her tea.

“The sad news is that Kedi is pregnant.”

At that point MmaMosadiwatlala shut her eyes for a moment. MmaPico realised that she was crying, albeit silently. She got closer to her and held her hand.

“Be strong, *mosadi*. God will never give you a cross and not bless you with the strength to carry it. Be strong, my friend. This is the time to give all to God in prayer.”

The two women held hands and MmaPico prayed. After that she stood up and called her neighbour, a municipal policeman, to accompany MmaMosadiwatlala to her home.

“It’s late, *rra*. You never know what these thugs would do.”

MmaMosadiwatlala went straight to bed in silence.

In the morning she woke up much earlier than she usually did.

Kedibone was woken up by the sound of her grandmother humming “Modimo ha a le teng, ha a yo mathata”. *There are no troubles in the presence of the Lord.*

She got out of bed and walked slowly to her grandmother’s bedroom.

“Morning, grandma,” she greeted.

“Morning, my child,” the old woman replied.

She realised that the old woman was crying.

“What is the matter, grandma?”

“I’m crying for you, my child. The tests say you are carrying that Portuguese boy’s child in you. I don’t know what we’re going to do. I have now put all on God’s hands, my child.”

Kedibone stood like a cloud of ice had just fallen on her. No word. No emotion. Only tears. She turned around and went back to her bedroom, shutting the door behind her. Silence enshrouded the whole house.

When MmaMosadiwatlala entered Kedibone’s bedroom with trepidation, hours after she had told her that she was pregnant, she found her in bed.

She looked around and upwards. Curtains were pulled and the door was shut. The room was dark. She lifted the blankets, starting from the head. Her granddaughter was in tears and she realised that she had no words to comfort her.

“Kedi,” she called.

Kedibone remained quiet.

“*Ngwanake*, only God knows why we are going through what we are going through. My heart is sore. Your uncle is angry. What that Portuguese boy did without realising is that he has changed the course of many lives in those few minutes of evil pleasure.”

Kedibone shut her eyes as if she wanted to listen to some sound in the distance.

The old woman left the room as if she was walking on eggs; slow and cautious. Minutes later she returned with two cups of coffee. She put them on the dressing table and went to sit on the edge of the bed. She lifted the blankets again. Kedibone’s eyes and cheeks were now dry. The old woman pulled the curtains to let some light in, but left the door closed.

“*Ngwanake*, please sit upright.”

She held Kedibone's right hand with her left hand. She gave her the cup of coffee.

"*Ngwanake*, our lives have changed forever. We better accept that reality now. We have to get used to the idea that you are going to have a child in the coming months."

Kedibone sat motionless. The old woman realised that she too had not touched or sipped her coffee since she came into Kedibone's bedroom.

Tears started falling again, this time from the grandmother. The granddaughter remained still, except for the blinking. Eventually Kedibone said a word.

"*Aumama*, I don't know what to say. I don't know what to do."

"Just be still, my child. All shall be fine. Faithful people like us must be foolish too. We must believe that God will take control even when we don't know how. That's how we are."

The old woman took the cup, still filled to the brim with coffee, but now cold, from her granddaughter, and left the room.

Kedibone retreated beneath the blankets like a tortoise into a shell.

The light of the sun pierced through her window, reflecting in the mirror mounted on the wardrobe. She stood up and pulled the curtain and the room darkened again. She got back under the blankets.

MmaMosadiwatlala had been living in silent pain for days when one Sunday morning she said to Kedibone that she didn't feel well enough to go to church.

"It would be too bad if none of us goes to church, my child. At least you must go and represent us. This house cannot do without God in times like these."

After Kedibone had left, the old woman called Matlholaadibona, who had been in his outside room for the whole morning.

He came in holding a glass of beer.

"*Sies!* You don't even respect a day of worship," she screamed.

"*Askies, mma.* But I had already poured it into the glass when you called me."

She stood up, went into the kitchen and came out with a cup of coffee. He also took one gulp and the beer was gone. He took the glass back to his room. He came back to the main house.

"I wonder if you are aware of the depth of the problem we're now in. We have to make a plan. Time is running out. Very soon people will see that Kedi is pregnant," the old woman said.

Matlholaadibona went up to the transistor radio on the room divider and lowered its volume.

“*Mma*, I’m a man. I wouldn’t know what to do when her time arrives. You are also of poor health. I suggest we talk to *mmangwane* in Taung and take Kedi there,” he said.

By “*mmangwane*” Matlholaadibona was referring to his aunt, his mother’s younger sister who lived in Taung, a conglomerate of tiny villages about hundred and thirty kilometres north of Kimberley.

MmaMosadiwatlala thought that her son’s idea made sense. Her sister lived behind the hospital in a village in Taung called Chief’s Court due to its proximity to the palace. If Kedibone were to have labour pains in the middle of the night, a neighbour could even get to the hospital, about a hundred metres away, on foot.

“Ke dumalana le wena, ngwanake,” the old woman said. *I agree with you, my son.*

She also felt relieved because, other than her immediate family, only MmaBaard and MmaPico knew that Kedibone was expectant. She could be taken to Taung before she started showing and the old woman would keep her dignity as a disciplined mother in the neighbourhood and in the church.

She looked at the portrait on the wall. It was her wedding photo. She was in white and he was in a black suit. They were smiling, like all brides and grooms smile on weddings pictures. She got married to her husband when she was eighteen and he was twenty-two. He was already working at a diamond mine and her father had just withdrawn her from school.

“Taking a girl child to school is a waste because she will be married into another family anyway,” her father said.

She had hopes of at least obtaining JC, the junior certificate that opened doors for some of her peers in nursing, teaching and clerical work. When the old man said she could not proceed beyond Standard Four, her heart was broken.

As she looked at the portrait, she thought of how she had always thought that Kedibone would live her dream. She thought her granddaughter would one day finish high school and maybe go to college, become a teacher or a nurse. Then the hot-blooded Portuguese boy came to shatter her dreams.

Matlholaadibona stood up and went to his room.

The house had been enveloped in uneasy silence since it was known that Kedibone was carrying the child of her rapist. Only the radio and an odd visitor broke the unending silence. MmaMosadiwatlala had been wondering whether her granddaughter would be able to love the child when it was born.

MmaMosadiwatlala knocked on MmaBaard’s door.

“Tsena,” she said. *Come on in.*

MmaBaard was busy on her Singer sewing machine.

“It’s just been me and this machine since this morning. Have you seen the new teacher who lives next door?”

“No. I have only heard about this new teacher,” MmaMosadiwatlala replied.

“He’s quite a short young man. I think his parents bought him new clothes because he only started to work this week. All his trousers need to be cut!”

The two women burst out laughing.

“But how are you, *mosadi*?” MmaBaard asked.

“I’m well, my friend. My biggest concern is Kedi,” she said.

MmaBaard stood up to brew tea and they continued talking.

“Oh, poor girl. How’s she coping? Did you see MmaPico as you said last time?”

“Yes, I did. MmaPico took her to hospital for the tests and they have confirmed my fears,” MmaMosadiwatla said.

“You mean she is pregnant?”

MmaBaard realised the kind of problem her friend was facing.

“What are you going to do, *mosadi*?” she asked.

MmaMosadiwatlala told her friend what her son suggested. It sounded like a good idea, MmaBaard concurred.

“Maybe removing her from this place might even help her to heal. In Taung she will see new people, hear new sounds and the environment in the village is quite different from here. I agree with you. The sooner she gets out of this place, the better.”

Later that afternoon when Kedibone arrived at home after running her grandmother’s errands in town, MmaMosadiwatlala told her about the idea.

“Grandma, as long as you are happy with that, I don’t have a problem,” she said, shrugging her shoulders.

Her grandmother explained that she’d come back to Galeshewe when she is strong enough after giving birth, to continue schooling.

“We can rise above this setback, my child. I still have bright dreams for you,” the grandmother said.

Kedibone kept quiet.

Matlholaadibona was sent to his aunt to talk to her and a week later Kedibone packed her suitcase and took the train to Taung.

The few months' stay in the village was pleasant for Kedibone. She got used to the blaring sheep and mooing cows. She enjoyed watering the vegetable garden and seeing carrots, spinach, potatoes and onions growing in front of her. Nobody was in a rush to get anywhere. All children respected all adults. Misbehaviour was rare and frowned upon. The villagers rallied around anyone on whom the cloud of death or any disaster had fallen. Kedibone began to look forward to the village her grandmother suggested they should migrate to. She liked the laid back life in the village.

After being in the village for a few months she gave birth to a baby boy and her grandmother named him Modisa. The name literally meant the shepherd or the keeper. The boy did not look like other boys born in the Taung District Hospital. He had blue eyes, fluffy hair and a very light skin. The nurses had seen many like him, especially when mothers had been in urban areas and only came to the villages to give birth, leave babies behind and go back to where they came from.

Kedibone returned to Kimberley very soon after the Christmas and New Year celebrations, in good time to enrol for the new term in school. Modisa was left behind in Taung. He would be one of the very few coloured children in the village. Other children called him "ngwana wa lekgowa," which meant a white child. That was due to his physical features. He looked like none of them, but was raised like them. He spoke Setswana, ate porridge and milk and ran around barefooted like all of them.

Kedibone repeated Standard Eight. Even though she was known to be a bright pupil, this time she approached her studies with less vigour and when in the middle of the year her grandmother suggested they move to Dikhudung, she did not protest.

Dikhudung village was about ten kilometres west of Kimberley on the road to Campbell. The sparsely populated village of mud houses and few brick houses was on the eastern foot of the Hill of Witches.

There were many stories why the hill had that name. The most probable story was that the founder of the village, the first *kgosi* of Bakhudu people, was a very paranoid and temperamental man. He always consulted with the village seer, Rradithudi, wanting to know who, among the villagers, was plotting to kill him. The latter would tell the *kgosi* that so and so was the spy for the neighbouring tribe and that soon Dikhudung would be attacked. In turn the *kgosi* would ask Rradithudi to create a story that the suspected spy was a witch. The poor fellow would then be taken to the hill to be executed.

The execution would be a simple but cruel act of being hanged on a tree until the poor soul departed from the body. He would then be buried in a deep grave that would be filled with stones. That is how the hill came to be known to Bakhudu as "Thaba ya Baloi," the *Hill of Witches*.

It was not only the spies who met the wrath of the chief, Kgosi Kgarubane. Old and ugly women who were also suspected of having caused the death of some people in the village

would also be hanged and buried in the deep graves on the hilltop. The *kgosi* would always, with the help of Rradithudi, find someone to blame for the devastating drought or the deaths of livestock.

People hardly went up to the hill. Whoever went up there would be suspected of going to consult with the evil spirits that brought bad luck to the village. Even the ones whose relatives met their death by hanging and were buried up there, never went up to the hill. All the graves were unmarked, making it almost impossible to find a relative's grave.

Dikhudung village was also surrounded by farms. It looked like an island in a sea of greenness. No agriculture was taking place in the village, only the diamond digging that had already exposed the village's intestines to the harsh and taunting sun.

On the western foot of the hill was the river that flows throughout the year. It was along the banks of the river where most of the digging was taking place. The villagers had since ceased to fish because they would be chased away by the diggers' security guards for trespassing.

Even without guards being around, the river could not be accessed due to the many holes that had been dug and left open along its banks. Many feared they would fall into the holes.

Without the fish and water for their vegetables, many villagers had come to rely on selling their labour at the diggings so that they could buy food and other essentials. It was almost forgotten that at some point they fished, planted vegetables and kept livestock. Then they had the river.

Things changed the day one white man in a suit came to see the *kgosi* about the possibility of the land being rich in diamonds. The man took soil samples and three months later some big machines were brought to the village.

It has been three generations since then. The villagers could no longer take their livestock to the river. They could no longer fish. They could not fetch water for their vegetable gardens. Women could no longer go to the river to wash clothes. Men could no longer bathe in the river in the early evenings. Young men could no longer wait for young women when they came to fetch water. Boys and girls could no longer swim in the river when days were hot.

Without the river life changed for the worst in Dikhudung village.

A water hole was bored and a windmill was put up on the top of the hill, but then instead of more wind, there was more heat and the windmill pumped out very little water. The villagers also had to share the borehole water with their horses, cattle, sheep and goats.

The situation became hopeless.

They began selling their livestock. Sheep and goats they sold at Galeshewe Township, mainly at the time of cultural and religious ceremonies. Cattle they took to a very big auction in Vryburg, two hundred kilometres further north on the road to Zimbabwe.

Very soon there was not a single cow in the village, no sheep and no goats. The only sounds were those of heavy machines that were milking the village of all its diamonds day and night as if they were in a hurry.

It was said that royalties were paid to *Kgosi* Kgarubane, the sixth in the lineage of Bakhudu chiefs since the breaking away of the group from the larger Batlhaping tribe.

In stark contrast, villagers were poor, even by the standards of the white men who sucked diamonds out of the intestines of his land.

His son, the heir apparent, was studying at a university in England, just like him and his brothers. His house, with its brick fencing and white walls, was a mansion.

It had been a decade since the last *pitso*, the tribal general meeting in which royalties and other tribal affairs were often discussed.

The *kgosi* often had a reason why the *pitso* could not be held. In the meantime, his village bled its diamonds and no one but he among the Bakhudu people got wealthier in the process.

Most healthy-looking men toiled at the diamond diggings. The only hope for better change was the children for whom the Berlin Mission Society had built a school.

After disembarking from the bus that continued on its journey to Campbell, Kedibone and MmaMosadiwatlala entered the village. There was only one entrance and a dirt road that led to and went past the royal place, then to the rest of the village.

A lorry with men in blue overalls at the back passed, leaving them in a cloud of dust.

“These men work in the diamond diggings, my child,” said the old woman.

“E le gore ba epa dikgaraga?” Kedibone asked. *Do they dig the ground in search for the diamonds, grandma?*

“Yes, my child. This land of our fathers has been dug for many years now. Maybe it is just hollow underneath our feet.”

Kedibone laughed.

“Really, grandma? Won’t the surface collapse if it just hollow underneath our feet?”

“No, my child, there are pillars that hold the roof of the shaft so that the earth would not collapse.”

“And how did you know about all these things, grandma?”

“Your grandfather worked in the diamond mines, not the shallow diggings that you see here. He had a boss, Van der Merwe, who used to enjoy my homebrewed beer.”

“Was Van der Merwe not a white man, grandma?” she asked.

“Yes, he was a white man from the Orange Free State. His father was a mine manager and he also became a mine manager.”

“So, a white man enjoyed your homebrew? Are you talking about the sorghum beer that you always make, grandma?”

“Yes, I’m talking about the very same sorghum beer that you know. Van der Merwe used to enjoy it. In the beginning other white men used to tell him that it would cause him to run to the lavatory very often. Then they came with all sorts of stories. But he never paid attention to them,” the old woman said, laughing.

“Grandma, you must have been adding something to that beer that made the white man defy all his friends and come to your house everyday!”

“No. I used the normal ingredients that all the other women used. I just had a good hand.”

“What are those ingredients, grandma?”

“I used *ditlhekwa* that we gathered from the veld to make beer. When it is a season when there are no *ditlhekwa* in the veld, I would use brown bread flour and brown sugar. The only thing that I added all the time was dry yeast,” the old woman explained.

The best homebrew was the one in which *ditlhekwa* was the main ingredients. The brewer had to crush slightly ripe *ditlhekwa* and add them to lukewarm water that had brown sugar and yeast. It had to be left for over a period of two days to ferment and then it would have its notorious kick.

Ditlhekwa, the old woman continued to explain to her granddaughter, are wild fruits. They are brownish when ripe and are mainly found in these parts of the country.

“We used to feast on *ditlhekwa* but they made us thirsty. You also had to be patient because most of the fruit is seed, which you needed not eat. Only the skin tasted sweet. Now, because most had no patience, they eat the whole thing and would be unable to release anything when they went into the bush.”

“Ao? So, what happened to them?” Kedibone asked, too embarrassed to laugh.

“Their parents had to either get someone with the *spyt* to help loosen their stomachs or they had to drink lots of milk,” the old woman said, laughing out very loud.

The granddaughter laughed too.

“But grandma, how did the white man find out about your sorghum beer?”

“*Ngwanake*, we used to brew beer when there were ceremonies such as *mpho ya badimo*, the weddings and when the boys came back from the mountain.”

Kedibone thought that these ceremonies are normally attended by black people only.

“No, my child. Even the white people who got bored when all the workers were attending a ceremony would come and look at us sing and dance. The next thing they were hungry and we have to give them food.”

“And then you, grandma, gave them your beer?”

“They wanted to taste it. I remember Van der Merwe asking me what’s been added to that beer when so many people were drunk. I said nothing. He wanted to taste it. He came back the following day asking for what’s left.”

“And then?”

“There was nothing, my child. I brewed for him. It takes one day and one night to ferment. It must be in a closed container, normally a calabash. It had to be covered with something on top and had to be in a warm part of the room.”

“So, Van der Merwe came after two days to get his sorghum beer?”

“Yes, he gulped a cup full and when he was done he looked me straight in the eye and asked how much did I want for the whole calabash.”

“How big was the calabash, grandma?”

It was this big, she said opening wide her hands to show that it might have been the size of an oil gallon.

“He gave me five shillings for it. His workers said he gave them half and knocked himself with another half. Before I knew it, I had to brew sorghum beer for him every Thursday so that it’s ready by Friday afternoon!”

“*Ijoo*, grandma. You have lived in interesting times!”

“Yes, my child. Even the *kgosi* expected me to lead the women when we had to brew for the biggest *pitso* of the year. Then they would slaughter not less than twenty cows and all the women had to go to the *kgotla* to cook and brew traditional beer.”

MmaMosadiwatlala, on whom the conversation and direction of the journey depended, stopped to cast her eyes far into the horizon. A tear fell.

“You know, we used to live happily here when I was your age. Times have gone and the world has changed.”

Kedibone didn’t know what to say. She took out a handkerchief and passed it on to her grandmother. She went back to their original conversation.

“So, this beer is special?”

“Yes, my child. It was special. It no longer is. In my time young men were initiated by older men into drinking beer. Women were frowned upon if they were seen drinking. Nowadays, everybody drinks. They even drink in public, in full view of children. *Sies!*”

Women were homemakers, she told her granddaughter.

“O kile wa bona kae mosadi yo o nwang bojalwa a tlhokomela bana?” she asked. *Where have you seen a drunken woman taking good care of her children and husband?*

“Ngwanake, if you are drunk you will burn your food and it will not taste good. You will also fall over and kill your newborn baby. Men are beasts. They have no food to cook. They have no children to birth, to breastfeed or take care of. They can drink all the time. Women cannot be like that, my child.”

“Sometimes I wish I lived then, grandma. Not now.”

“My child, God has decided that we must live now. Just like those who have lived before us, we also have a reason to be here at this moment. God is not a fool,” MmaMosadiwatlala said.

The arrival of a new family in Dikhudung had to be reported at the *kgotla*, the traditional authority. The *kgosi* and his advisors had to be satisfied that the new family had its origins in Dikhudung. Thereafter the new family could settle on a piece of land that the *kgosi* or his chosen messenger would allocate them.

The year was nearing its end. Many working people and children of school-going age were at home for holidays. But the narrow streets, most of which were a network of pathways, seemed deserted.

Dikhudung was vastly different from the sprawling township of Galeshewe. The first thing that Kedibone noticed was the absence of electricity pylons in the village. And then she saw the pit lavatories that were located hundreds of metres away from houses.

Unlike in the townships, there were no houses that looked the same and the streets had no names. There was a kraal next to almost every house. Some houses were built with mud, others with corrugated iron and very few with cement bricks. Why her grandmother had decided that they should relocate to such a place, only the old woman and her God knew.

After the *kgosi* had allocated them a piece of land, young men came to help them set up a shack and erect a fence. The new family also had to be introduced to the neighbours.

The greetings normally took a form of a traditional praise poem, known by every member of the clan and having been passed from generation to generation.

“Dumelang, dikhudu. Dumelang lona batho ba go tsamaya ka bonya mme ba goroge kwa boyo. Dumelang lona batho ba go gonyela mo legapeng, dira di nagane gore lo matlapa!”

Greetings to you, children of the great turtle/ You who walk slow but get to your destination/ Greetings to you people who can retreat into your shell/ and make the foe think you are the rock.

It wasn't long after Kedibone and his grandmother had relocated to Dikhudung when Kedibone walked past the village's only shebeen, Downhill, on her way to the communal tap.

She couldn't understand how could people be at a shebeen, drinking beer, at ten o'clock in the morning.

"It's not that Galeshewe Township is better. I just expected it to be better here since grandma has been saying things about how people behave badly in the township," she said to herself.

"Dumela, kgarebe," said a man in his thirties. *Good morning, young woman.*

She had been buried so deep in thought that the voice surprised her. She had not even realised that the cattle in front of her might be having a herder.

"Dumela, rra," she replied. *Good morning, Sir.*

"Are you new here? I know everyone in this village but I have never seen you before. Are you perhaps a visitor?"

"No, Sir. I'm not a visitor. I live here. We have only been here for two months. We are from Galeshewe. I live with my grandmother. My uncle works in town and comes only on weekends."

"My name is Godknows Molehe. I live here. I have been here for as long as I remember. The bones of my ancestors were buried here. I'm the son of Tumang Molehe. Tumang is the son of Kgosiemang Molehe. Kgosiemang was the son of Itireleng Molehe. Itireleng was the son of Kgantlapane Molehe. Kgantlapane was the son of Goitsemodimo Molehe, the man I was named after. All of them are dead except Tumang, my father, who is also very old and frail."

Kedibone's jaw had since dropped.

"I wish I knew my family the way you know yours, rre Molehe," she said, remembering that her grandmother told her that in the village family is bigger than individuals.

"In the village we are all part of one family. When you introduce yourself, you have to tell people about your parents. It is only when they recognise your parents that they can acknowledge you as a legitimate daughter of the village," her grandmother had said while they were still planning to relocate to the village.

"I wish I too had a story to tell about my ancestors. I'm just a plain Kedibone Mosadiwatlala. I was born in Galeshewe Township in Kimberley. I also grew up there. My grandmother is old. She is a pensioner now. She was born here and grew up here. She went to Kimberley after she married my late grandfather. We came back because she wants to be buried here too."

Godknows realised that time was in flight, the sun was already heating up and the cattle had to be taken to the veld.

“I hope to see you again, Kedibone. Unfortunately I must go and find a better grazing spot for my cattle,” Godknows said.

“You better go then. Have a good day, *rra*.”

Kedibone had only walked a few feet towards the communal tap when she turned around to cast her eyes at Godknows.

“What a man,” she thought.

She realised that she had been smiling all along when another woman at the tap asked her if she had been charmed by Godknows.

“He is a good man, that one. Every mother in Dikhudung would like him to be her son-in-law,” the woman said.

Kedibone just giggled.

She thought of the muscular man with dark skin and well defined features that she just met. She couldn't take her mind off his easy smile and perfect set of teeth, his confidence and his respectful gestures as he spoke.

Godknows had paid Kedibone a visit several times when MmaMosadiwatlala started becoming concerned.

“My children, if a man does not intend to marry you then don't waste your time with him,” she said.

“Ek sê maar net,” she said one afternoon. *I'm just saying*.

The two lovebirds started meeting at night about a few yards away from the Mosadiwatlala household when Kedibone's grandmother had fallen asleep. Then later Godknows came closer, meeting his beloved Kedibone just outside the house.

One night the old woman woke up with the intention of going to the small house only to find a stranger standing outside her house, holding her granddaughter in a way that encouraged blood to run wild in her veins. She pretended not to have seen them and retreated into the main house as quickly as her reflexes could allow. Godknows and Kedibone realised that they had been found out.

Kedibone asked Godknows to stay away for a couple of days.

“Maybe she will think that her eyes deceived her. If she asks me I'll say she's mistaken.”

But hearts in love are like birds calling each other. Godknows returned the next night, not aware that the old woman had become quietly vigilant, observing her granddaughter's every movement after the dark.

The following day while Kedibone was busy with household chores, MmaMosadiwatlala's speech carried weight.

"Kedi, I have heard that your boyfriend's father has herds and herds of cattle and that he's the only son. It's about time he stops coming into my house when he thinks I'm sleeping. He must marry you."

Kedibone was caught unawares by the old woman's question.

"*Ijoo!* Grandma, how can you say that?" asked Kedibone, her right hand on her mouth.

"O nkutlwile," she said. *You heard me.*

"My days on earth are numbered, my child. Your uncle is a drunkard. It's just a matter of time he'll be stabbed to death by thugs. You must get married into a wealthy family. Otherwise how are you going to get out of this poverty?"

Tears swelling in her eyes, Kedibone looked upwards.

"Grandma, we've just met. It's not even two months and you're saying he must marry me."

"My child, if you meet a man from a wealthy family you must not let go of him. That boy must marry you," the old woman stomped her foot on the floor.

"Grandma, I was hoping to go back to Galeshewe and attend night school until I finish Form Five. Maybe I'll get a good job after that."

MmaMosadiwatlala shook her head.

"My child, please listen to me. I wanted you to finish school. Even my ancestors know what's in my heart. But you know what happened and how we got here. We're in this village now. You can go back to Galeshewe and attend night school until you finish Form Five. But who will take care of me?"

Kedibone told her grandmother that Godknows was a decade and half older than her.

"Men have always married younger women. Your grandfather was twenty-one years older than me. What matters, my child, is whether the man can take care of his wife. Nothing else matters," MmaMosadiwatlala said.

"Grandma, I don't know. I'll think about what you just said. I'll talk to him too."

"What's there to think and talk about? This is about following our traditions. It's about doing the right thing, my child. No man enters my house and touches a woman just to satisfy his desires. He must marry you."

"When your uncle comes here on Friday I'm going to tell him. Things cannot go on like this. He must go and tell your boyfriend's father about this situation," the old woman said.

In her early twenties, Kedibone had never had a boyfriend before. And despite the age gap that worried her from time to time, the poor girl was in love. If, for any reason, Godknows did not arrive after she had waited for him, she'd be in a bad mood. Only a fly could touch her. On the other hand his presence would light up her life. She wouldn't stop smiling until the following day.

But the grandmother was quite strict; she would not allow her granddaughter's boyfriend to get inside the house. The poor lovebirds had to sit under the *mokala* tree, even when it was cold. No wonder Godknows felt that he was pressured to marry. Otherwise he would never have any status in that household.

Then, almost out of the blue, Kedibone told her grandmother that she had spoken to Godknows and that his parents knew of his intention to marry her.

But at that time, the reality that her grandmother would have to live alone at her very old age also pierced through her heart like a red-hot spear. The old woman was also getting frailer by the day.

“Will you at least go and collect my pills every month at the clinic in Galeshewe?”

“Yes grandma, I will.”

For a moment the room went quiet save for a swarm that passed in front of the house. In a minute some uncomfortable peace returned. But the conversation did not continue.

“Can I make some tea, grandma?”

“Yes, my child.”

Indeed the marriage, however wonderful it was going to be for Kedibone, was also going to break down a beautiful relationship between the grandmother and her granddaughter. They had been together for as long as Kedibone had been alive. After the death of her husband, the old woman could have been buried in loneliness had it not been for her granddaughter.

A bead of sweat dropped on the old woman's lap.

“This tea is quite hot.”

“Grandma, you always say that heat can only be counterpoised with another heat.”

The woman felt a sense of achievement that her granddaughter would get married to an affluent family in Dikhudung. Every mother hoped that Godknows would marry into their families.

Matlholaadibona arrived at Dikhudung village late on Friday night as usual.

That's how he lived; weekdays he spent alone at the house in the township and weekends he came to the village, with all the dirty clothes for his mother or niece to wash and iron before going back to Kimberley on Sunday afternoons.

It was the end of the month and the people who got paid monthly and those who got paid fortnightly had received their meagre wages and were happy and celebrating.

Downhill was the village's centre of fun and brawls, Maspoto was the happiest woman the villagers had ever seen. Moving up and down serving happy customers and collecting debts, she did not even have the time to put the money in her bag. She just counted it and pushed it down her ample breast. She also never used to write down the names of those who took beer on credit. She knew them all and how much they owed her. The music volume had to be high so that the petrol generator that was providing power could not be heard over the music.

People got drunk and danced. Those who have had enough would simply be taken home by Tebogo and Tebogonyana, the twin brothers who worked for Maspoto as bouncers, delivery boys, cleaners and nobody knows what else.

Matlholaadibona, drunk as he was from town, could not resist the urge to pass by Downhill and get two quarts of beer before reaching home.

He was surprised the candle was still burning when he approached home.

"*Mma*, how come you are not asleep at this time. It must be way after ten o'clock," he said to his mother.

"I have been waiting for you to arrive. You must stop travelling at night, Matlholaadibona. You knock off at five o'clock. I don't know why you get here so late. I don't want to bury a child. Haven't you heard that township thugs have now invaded our village? On Wednesday an old man was found stabbed to death and all his pension money taken away. Next time they will kill you."

"*Mma*, these boys don't rob men like me. They rob and kill old and frail pensioners who cannot fight back. It's you who must not get out of the yard, *mama*. I'm fine."

He called Kedibone and gave her the milk and cheese that he brought with him every Friday. This week he also brought meat and some groceries.

"Dumela, malome," she greeted him. *Good evening, uncle.*

"Dumela, Kedi."

Expecting her grandmother to talk to her uncle about her boyfriend, she quickly got out of sight.

"Matlholaadibona, your niece here is seeing a young man in this village," the old woman started.

"*Mma*, what are you saying?"

“Yes. That boy has even been here,” she said.

“That boy is undermining you, *mma*. Kedibone must come here and tell me where this boy lives. I must find him tonight. Nobody will disrespect my mother while I’m still alive,” Matlholaadibona fumed.

“Wait, my son. That is not the way. I don’t want trouble. I want you to visit the boy’s father tomorrow morning and tell him that his dog has crossed the line. If the young man intends to marry Kedibone, let him do so. Otherwise he must leave my granddaughter alone.”

“I’m sorry, *mma*. I was just angry at the thought of you being disrespected. Tomorrow morning I’ll do as you say. But who are these people?” he asked.

“They are the Molehe family. They live next to the river. You’ll see a big brick house with a *mokala* tree in the centre of a kraal. That’s where they live. The old man wakes up quite early.”

Matlholaadibona did as his mother requested. *Ka makuku a ‘naka tsa kgomo*, as his people would describe the early morning before the break of dawn, his head slowly rose out of the blankets like a tortoise would out of its shell.

He went out to the small house to rinse the bladder and brush his teeth. Then back inside the house to wash his face and have tea. He then took his Raleigh bicycle and left.

Kedibone heard the gate closed and her heart skipped a bit.

The journey to the Molehe homestead was not that long. It took twenty minutes at the most. Overlooking the river, curtained by the hill on the northern side, the homestead came only second to the royal house in terms of size and beauty. Its white paint was bright under the moon and in broad daylight. Its roof, windows and door frames were painted in maroon colour.

Two dogs rushed to the gate and barked furiously as Matlholaadibona approached. A man came to the gate that was padlocked. He ordered the dogs to go to the kennels.

“Dumela rra. A nka go thusa?” a man came and asked. *Good morning, Sir. How can I be of assistance to you?*

“My name is Matlholaadibona Mosadiwatlala. I am here to see to Rre Molehe. It’s quite an important and private matter. That’s why I woke up before herders started tending to the cattle to come and see him.”

The man opened the gate and let Matlholaadibona sit under the *mokala* tree. After what seemed like eternity an elderly man came walking slow, balancing with a stick, towards Matlholaadibona.

“Dumela, mogaetsho,” he greeted. *Good morning, man of our people.*

“I hear that you could hardly wait until the sun comes out to come and see me. What may be the matter?” the old man asked.

“Dumela, Rre Molehe. I am the son of Mosadiwatlala. I live not too far from your home with my elderly mother and my niece. I work in town and only come home on weekends. My mother tells me that your son has been a regular visitor of my niece for some time now and we thought it is important that we properly report this matter to you before it gets out of hand.”

The old man called the male servant who opened the gate for Matlholaadibona.

“Please tell Godknows I want to see him.”

With the wink of an eye the young man was standing in front of the two men under the tree.

“This man says he is the uncle of a girl you have been visiting these days. He is here to report your misdemeanour. Do you know a girl called Kedibone Mosadiwatlala,” the old man asked.

“Ee, rra. Ke a mo itse,” Godknows replied. *Yes, father. I know her.*

“Have you been visiting her regularly?”

“Ee, rra.” *Yes, Sir.*

“That’s all I needed to know. Please make some tea for us and see to it that the herders are up.”

The meeting between old man Molehe and Matlholaadibona ended with an agreement that Godknows would marry Kedibone.

Matlholaadibona and his mother consulted with other relatives living in other towns and then decided that *bogadi*, the bride price, would be fifteen cows and a horse, brought in broad daylight to the Mosadiwatlala household.

Kedibone got married to Goitsemodimo Godknows Molehe in a customary Magdalena marriage. The whole village gathered at the Mosadiwatlala household to see the bride, *ngwetsi*, leaving her grandmother’s home to join the new family and take up the new name.

She would no longer be seen in the company of unmarried women or with her hair or knees exposed. She would now be a homemaker; clean the house, keep her husband fed, clean, healthy and bear him children.

A few days later Kedibone and Godknows went to the commissioner’s office in Kimberley to sign and obtain a marriage certificate. They were now legally a husband and wife.

Matlholaadibona had to resign from his diary job and come to live in the village. His aged and ailing mother could not live alone. The family also had a small herd of cattle that needed to be taken care of. In a year most cows would be having calves. The herd would have gotten

bigger. Life had taken a turn for the best. Galeshewe Township was the past, a colourful memory.

Kedibone and Godknows lived for a while in a servant's room in his father's homestead. About two months later a house his father built for him was complete and they moved out to live on their own. Although it was small, it was also a brick house, one of the few in the village.

They had no child, but were hoping to have one.

The second Friday of the month was a payday for those who got received their meagre wages on fortnights.

As usual on days like these, Downhill took the centre stage. It became the village's hive of activity. Many men came for a cold beer to pay tribute to their daily efforts of working like slaves for days on end, feeding their often large families.

"Nna ke tlile go iteboga," they would often be heard saying. *I'm here to pay homage to my efforts.*

Maspoto, an unrivalled busybody with a smile that stretched from one ear to the other, negotiated her way through her customers, her ample bum not making it easy both for her and them.

She was also a no-nonsense type, that one. Those who owed her and could not pay her in time knew that she could walk into any man's house, switch off the television when the whole family was watching and take it away.

"Tell your husband to pay me. Then you will get your television back. I did not teach him to drink."

Among a throng of men at Downhill, was Godknows Molehe, who was as jolly as always that evening. He had his best friend, the brown bottle.

"Carling Black Label, my friend in good times and bad times," he would often say before downing a beer.

Maspoto was also infamous for dropping bombshells when least expected. That evening everybody could see through her mischievous smile and roving eyes that she was about to embarrass somebody. She seemed happier than most people in the shebeen.

"Molehe, I hear things about your lovely wife in the village," she said, and everybody went quiet in anticipation.

Godknows' heart started stomping.

"What have you heard? Is someone sleeping with my wife?"

“No, Molehe. It is not that one. But people talk, *rra*.”

Godknows got more agitated.

“Maspoto, I don’t care whether this is your house or not. I am becoming impatient. Which of these men has slept with my wife,” he said, pointing his index finger like a digger’s foreman trying to impress a young concubine.

“*Rra*, I hear that your wife has some numbers tattooed on her inner left thigh. Is it true?” she asked with both her hands on her hips and a mischievous smile on her face.

Godknows’ heart sunk to its deepest. He didn’t know what to say. He sobered immediately. He looked around and realised that everybody was quiet. He saw embarrassment in their eyes. The silence went for almost two minutes. The song that had been playing on the jukebox had also gone quiet and nobody went up to put in a coin for another song, or to repeat Yvonne Chaka Chaka’s *Thank You Mister Deejay* that had already been played as many times that evening as the poor singer’s years on earth.

He cleared his throat, stood up and went up to Maspoto. He looked straight into her eyes.

“Who told you that, woman? Who told you that my wife has numbers tattooed on her thigh?” he asked with his finger right between her eyes.

Nobody had ever seen Godknows that angry before. His eyes were full of flames. He was sweating and shaking. But his speech was firm and clear.

“Maspoto, I am asking you for the very last time. Who slept with my wife? Tell me or I will kill you with my bare hands now.”

Maspoto looked at his hands, then up into his fiery eyes and started shaking. She had just turned her head towards a group of men at the furthest corner of her shebeen when Pitoro shot out of the place like a bullet.

“That’s him,” she said pointing at the drunkard who had suddenly acquired the sprinting prowess of an antelope.

Godknows looked at the running figure that was already disappearing into the bush. He looked at everybody, looked at the brown bottle that he had been drinking from. He took it and threw it at the wall. It went like bombs explode on films, splinters everywhere. He looked at everybody and raised his index finger as if he was just about to say “One word and you are dead.”

Godknows left Downhill shebeen enveloped in uneasy silence, fire burning in his heart.

He was so angry that everybody in the shebeen could even hear him breathe in and out. Only a fool could not predict that either Pitoro or Godknows’ wife would be dead meat by the time he had finished with one of them.

With Godknows gone, it was Maspoto’s turn to tell the story of the tattoo.

Tebogo Mogale, one of the most loyal patrons was the first to ask for an explanation.

“Maspoto, I have never seen Godknows so angry in his life. If Pitoro had not bolted out of this place, he would be dead by now. We can’t be so scared for nothing. Tell us the whole story about this tattoo.”

“I will tell because it is you, Mogale, who is asking. You are the backbone of this shebeen. If it was just anybody else I wasn’t going to tell,” Maspoto said with a cheeky look at the other patrons, most of them still recovering from shock.

Maspoto said that it all started the day Pitoro came to her shebeen all smiles the other morning.

“How come you are here so early? It is only nine o’clock and you want to tell me that your cattle are already out in the veld,” Maspoto asked Pitoro.

“Maspoto, I need one quart of Black Label on credit. I’ll pay on Friday.”

“But why are you shaking?” she asked.

Pitoro wiped his face with the outer part of his hand.

“Maspoto, I always pay you on time. Just give me one quart and stay away from matters that don’t concern you.”

Maspoto looked straight into Pitoro’s eyes as if she suspected something. One hand went to her waist.

“Why do I smell a rat, Pitoro?”

“Maspoto, I was almost caught in another man’s house this morning. I hope that’s enough for you to give me beer on credit.”

“And you’re making my shebeen a stop-over?”

“Maspoto, you have just made me say something that I would not say even to my closest friend. Just zip your mouth and give me beer on credit. I’ll pay you at the end of the week like I always do.”

Maspoto left him sitting on a plastic chair under the tree behind her house. She went inside and came out holding two bottles. This time she came out wearing a smile.

“Pitoro, if you tell me everything, you’re not going to pay for these and I won’t tell a soul,” she said, putting the two quarts on a steel table in front of him.

Pitoro looked at Maspoto, took one bottle and opened it using his teeth.

“Maspoto, you’re really putting on a corner here. I’ll tell but you must first promise that you won’t let the cat out of the bag, because if anyone hears about this I am dead.”

“Ga nkitla ke rothisa mmutlwa madi,” she said moving her two fingers through her lips. *I’ll not let the cat out of the bag.*

“You know, I’ve been seeing Godknows’ wife for a while.”

“What?”

“Hey, don’t be surprised! It’s not as if I’m the first man to have a concubine!”

“Don’t get me wrong, Pitoro. I know that most men have concubines. It’s just that it’s something one never thinks it would be done by people you know,” Maspoto said.

“But please zip your mouth, Maspoto. If that man hears about this I’ll be dead, I’m telling you,” he said, pulling two fingers across his lips.

“Anyway, this morning Godknows told his wife he was going to town to get some medicines for his two sick cows. So his wife went to the tap to fetch water and made a signal when she passed by my house that the man is gone.”

“And then?”

Pitoro went to the house a few minutes after taking the cattle to the veld and finding a grazing spot for them near the river. Just after entering Godknows’ house through the front door pretending to neighbours that he was going to look for him, he started kissing and fondling Kedibone. They had just closed the door and his trousers were down to his knees when they heard Godknows greet Moroke, the old man who lived next door.

“I jumped out of the window at the back!”

Maspoto burst out laughing until her cheeks were wet with tears.

“Now what did Kedibone do after you escaped?”

“I have no idea. She must have pulled her panties up because it was down to her knees. We were just about to do it.”

Pitoro told Maspoto that he and Kedibone often had moments of passion at a friend’s place in town.

“This was the first time we were taking a chance in the village,” he said.

“That’s a stupid chance you took, Pitoro,” she said.

“But I’m telling you, Maspoto. I have never met a woman who makes love the way Kedibone does. She has the energy of a teenager. She dances like an initiate on top of you until you get crazy. That woman can make moves, I’m telling you. If I didn’t have children with Maria I’d have left her for Kedibone long time ago.”

“You mean she can dish out?”

“Even you, Maspoto, can never get close to that woman.”

“Pitoro you must count your words, *wena*. You have never slept with me. How do you know that Kedibone can do a man better than I can?”

“Sorry, man. But since the first day I got it on with her, I have never looked back.”

“And then how do you keep up with her energy?”

“There is an old man in Galeshewe who mixes herbs that helps to get your little man up all night.”

And the story of the tattoo came out.

“But there is something about her that is troubling me. She has numbers tattooed on the inner upper part of her left thigh. It looks like a date or something.”

“What? And you have never asked her about it?”

“I tried twice and both occasions she would get so angry I had to go home without even a kiss. I have since given up. To this day it’s still a mystery.”

Godknows walked into his house like a member of the chief’s regiment going to kill a lion that has been devouring the livestock for a long time.

“Kedibone,” he screamed.

“Kedibone, I’m calling you! Can’t you hear?”

“I’m here in the bedroom, *rra*,” she answered from the bedroom.

He walked through to the bedroom and kicked the door even though it was already half-open.

“*Rra*, why are you shouting? What’s wrong,” asked Kedibone, who had been busy packing the clothes that she had just ironed.

“You know, I thought you are a woman I could trust. Little did I know that I’m living with a snake in my house,” he said, wagging a finger with his sweat dripping from his face.

“*Rra*, I don’t understand you?”

“You don’t understand me? Is that what you’re saying? Am I speaking a foreign language?”

“*Rra*, why are you so angry? What happened?” her voice was already shaking.

“Kedibone, when I married you I thought I was marrying a faithful woman. I thought you’d never betray me. Now I hear from drunkards at Downhill that you have been sleeping around!”

Kedibone realised that it was pouring and not raining.

“*Rra*, I don’t know what you are talking about,” she said, retreating towards the furthest corner of the tiny bedroom.

At that time Godknows was already pouncing on her. He grabbed by her right leg and lifted up her dress. She fell by her head on the bed.

He pointed at the tattooed numbers on her thigh.

“If you have not been sleeping with other men, how do they know about these? Tell me!”

“*Rra?*”

“Answer my question, woman!”

“Maybe they heard from their wives, *rra*.”

“What? Don’t take me for a fool, you bloody snake! Do I look like a child to you? Eh? Do I look like a child that you can just lie to? You want to tell me that you have walked around undressing in front of all the women in this village,” he screamed.

Before she could even say a word Godknows let go of her leg and lifted up his hands. Then he clenched his fists and screamed more.

“God, please help me. I don’t want to kill this woman. She is driving me mad and if she continues lying to me I’m going to kill her.”

Kedibone’s eyes were already streaming with tears.

“*Rra*, I’ll explain. I’m sorry.”

“Explain what? Sorry for what?”

“I . . . I . . .”

“You’re suddenly stuttering!”

“I . . . I slept with Pitoro. I’m . . . I’m very sorry, *rra*.”

“You did what? Say that again!”

Godknows invoked the spirits of his ancestors.

“*Ke ikana ka Bakhudu ba ntsetse!* My ears are definitely lying to me? Earth, please open up and swallow me! I can’t take this anymore!”

“*Rra*, I have wronged you and I’m very sorry.”

“Don’t say another word, woman!”

“*Rra*, please forgive me. I’m begging you.”

“I said shut the hell up,” he barked.

She was already down on her knees, hands held together as if she was worshipping.

“*Rra*, please.”

Godknows quickly grabbed her by the neck and pushed her head to the wall.

She started screaming.

“*Ijoo, mma wee!*”

He kicked her in the stomach, ribs, thighs and everywhere else. Her tiny body moved from left to right, then down on the floor. He descended upon her. He choked her and beat her head against the floor. He sat on her and started punching her face.

“*Rra*, you are killing me.”

He said nothing. He just continued punching her.

“I married you in broad daylight. I lost fifteen heads of cattle and a horse on you. And you still open your legs for another man! What do you take me for?”

He punched harder.

She screamed more.

He punched and stood up and kicked.

Then she said no word anymore.

He kept on kicking her.

Blood started coming out her mouth and nose. No word came from her.

But he kept kicking, albeit with less vigour than when he had started.

He then left the house, banging the door behind him.

He sat on the *stoep*, cupping his face with his hands. Minutes later he went to his neighbour Moroke’s house, where men had been drinking home-brewed sorghum since early in the morning. He greeted called Moroke aside.

“*Rre* Moroke, I have done something very, very bad. I raised a hand and beat my wife. I beat her badly.”

Old man Moroke's ears stood up.

"Son, you have done a very bad thing. Bakhudu men do not raise their hands to their women. Is she very bad?"

"*Ee rra*. She is very bad. I think she must be taken to the hospital."

The old man threw his eyes on the men who had been sitting in a circle, trying to find a younger one who was not as drunk as the rest.

"Pule, run to the *kgosi* and inform him that Molehe's wife needs to be taken to the hospital urgently. Tell the *kgosi* that I humbly request that he helps with his bakkie."

Pule stood up and jumped on the bicycle without a question.

Moroke looked at the men who had stopped the conversation they were having.

"I want you men to hold on to Molehe. He just confessed to having beaten his wife badly. He is not allowed to move, even to relieve himself. If he wants to go to the small house, three men must escort him. I'm going to his house to see how bad his wife is. I'll be back."

Godknows was shaking when the old man emerged from his house.

"Young men, hold on to Molehe," Moroke repeated before going into Godknows' house.

"Don't let him go! One of you must run after Pule. Get the *kgosi* to call the police. What I have seen now surpasses all the brutality I have ever seen in my life."

One tear was falling down the old man's face.

"What were you thinking, son? Are you mad or what? How can you beat up your wife like that?" old man Moroke asked. He wiped a tear with the outer part of his hand.

Godknows kept quiet.

"Let's finish him, Rre Moroke. He came to you knowing very well what he had done," one of the men said.

"No, my son. This matter is messy as it is. Leave it to *kgosi* and the police to deal with. This man is going straight to jail. His ancestors would be with him if he's not hanged. I even doubt that his wife will make it," Moroke said.

Kgosi Kgarubane arrived in his Datsun bakkie, with Pule and his bicycle at the back.

The circle of men around Godknows had grown bigger and the level of noise had risen.

There was uneasy silence when the *Kgosi* got out of the car.

"*Dikhudu*," he greeted the men.

“Kgosi e e mpusang,” they replied. *The reigning chief.*

“Moroke, is this the man who beat up his wife to death,” the *Kgosi* asked, pointing at Godknows.

“This is our man, *kgosi*. He is your subject, the son of Molehe. But his wife is not dead. She is still alive and hopefully the doctors will save her life if you can help us get her to the hospital in town quickly,” old man Moroke said.

Almost the whole village had converged to find out why Godknows was captured.

“Moroke, get the senior women to prepare MmaMolehe so that we can rush her to Kimberley now.”

“I shall do as you say, *Kgosi*.”

MmaKobedi and the other women went into Godknows’ house. One young woman emerged out of the house crying.

Moroke looked at a group of women who were standing outside Godknows’ house.

“I need another woman to go in there and help. But if you don’t have a strong heart, please don’t go.”

Another elderly woman went in.

Minutes later a mattress was taken out and placed in the back of the Datsun.

A young woman came running to tell the *kgosi* that Kedibone’s grandmother had fainted at her home.

“*Dikhubu*, I thought that either I or Moroke had to go and tell MmaMosadiwatlala that her granddaughter has been beaten. Now one of you has run to tell the poor old woman the horrible news. Now I hear that she has fainted. If that woman dies of heart attack would that gossip monger take the responsibility?”

People looked at each other.

“This young man has turned my village upside down,” the *kgosi* said to Moroke.

The *kgosi* sent more women to attend to Kedibone’s grandmother.

Moroke accompanied the *kgosi* and three women, one elderly and two in their thirties, sat at the back of the Datsun with Kedibone.

“Molehe must be held until the police come here. Either I or Moroke will come with the police. But we’ll go to them after leaving the women at the hospital. That man must not leave,” the *kgosi* instructed the village men.

The bakkie roared, slowly leaving the villagers watching, with a cloud of smoke tailing it. Once it got to the tarred road, it tried its best to leave the village behind. After what seemed like eternity, the lights of the city appeared and the brightness increased by the minute until the Datsun arrived at the hospital.

A security officer at the Kimberley Hospital's main entrance saw that the bakkie was in a hurry and without asking a question, simply directed them to the casualty section.

One of the paramedics who were smoking at the parking zone outside the casualty section noticed *Kgosi* Kgarubane and rushed to him.

"*Kgosi*, it looks like you need some help here."

He called his colleague.

Kedibone was rushed straight to the resuscitation room and within a minute there were machines and pipes of sorts all over her.

Kgosi Kgarubane and the women were asked to make way for the nurses and doctors to do their work. The door was shut and curtains pulled.

"*Kgosi*, I have a bad feeling about this," old man Moroke said.

The *kgosi* nodded.

A neatly dressed woman approached them.

"Dumelang bagaetsho," she greeted. *Good evening.*

"Who is going to fill in the forms for the patient? We need her particulars because we are opening a file," the woman said.

They looked at each other.

"Moroke, MmaMolehe and her husband are your neighbours. You must accompany this woman to open the file. Meanwhile I'll go to the police station."

As Moroke stood up and followed the young woman, two more doctors went into the resuscitation room.

"*Kgosi*, I have a fear that this poor girl might not survive. I have never seen a black person being attended to by so many doctors in this hospital. Now it's three doctors and four nurses in that little room," MmaKobedi said.

"MmaKobedi, it is times like these when we have to put our trust in God. When last have you been to a gravesite?"

"It's been a while, *Kgosi*."

“That’s the problem, *mma*. If we don’t talk to our ancestors to talk to God on our behalf, we give the space for strange spirits to come in. We were not supposed to be here today. We don’t know what got into that boy. From here I’m going to the police. But how many of my subjects are now possessed by the same spirit?”

Their conversation was interrupted by a nurse.

“I have been asked to inform you that the patient is very critical and that we are taking her upstairs to the operating theatre. The doctors are doing all they can to save her life.”

When *Kgosi* Kgarubane arrived in Dikhudung with a yellow police van behind his Datsun, he found that Godknows was tied to a tree and his face was already full of blood. Men were still sitting in a circle around him, some of them holding sticks and knobkerries.

The crowd was smaller than when he left with Morohe and the women to take Kedibone to hospital. Some women left the moment Kedibone was taken to the hospital. Children were still hanging outside the three-lined fence, although they had been told several times to go home.

The *kgosi* got out of his bakkie, put on his old army hat and walked towards the men and the man they held captive.

“Men, I have come with these two men of the law,” he said, pointing at the two policemen who were coming out of the police van.

“They are here to arrest Molehe. As I said that this matter cannot be dealt with in the traditional court, I have gone to summon the police to come to our village and do their work,” the *kgosi* continued to address his men.

At that time people were already gathering. Some were even on horseback.

“I told you when I left that no one is allowed to beat this man. Now I see that his face is full of blood and his clothes are tattered. Some of you have not heeded my instruction. But we’ll deal with that once the policemen have taken care of the bigger problem.”

One of the men asked to speak.

“*Kgosi*, if a man’s wife sleeps with other men, isn’t that man allowed to discipline his wife? I think we are wrong to involve men of the law in this matter. We can solve this matter ourselves. Maybe *kgosi* can impose a penalty of a herd of cattle on this man.”

Kgosi Kgarubane shook his head. He looked at the two policemen flanking him and realised that they had taken their caps off. He cast his eyes back to the man who just spoke.

“Puophaa, I hear you. I hope you also remember that when a young man marries, senior men tell him to seek their counsel when things get out of hand at home. This man has not done that. I don’t know what happened. I’m hearing it for the first time, from you, that his wife

slept around. Unfortunately the woman is not here to speak for herself. But what I'm saying is that instead of seeking help, Molehe went home and beat his wife severely. If we let this go, all of you will follow his example and there will be chaos in my village. This man broke the tradition that has been respected since the time my great-grandfather was reigning here."

The *kgosi* had spoken.

An idiom in his Setswana language said "Lefoko la kgosi le agelwa mosako." *Subjects rally around the kgosi's final word.*

Even Puophaa knew that he could not argue with the *kgosi*. The matter was settled.

"You can take him," the *kgosi* instructed the policeman, who untied Godknows from the *mokala* tree and locked him in the back of the van.

The sun was about to slip into the western horizon when old man Moroke, accompanied by two people, a man and a woman, entered Dikhudung village in a white car.

Unlike the police van that left some two hours earlier that day, this one moved in slowly, almost reluctantly.

One of Moroke's companions, the woman, was a nurse, dressed in white from her knees upwards, with maroon epaulettes adorning her shoulders.

The man, in a white shirt and a grey pair of trousers, looked like an office worker, a clerk perhaps. He was the one driving.

Before reaching MmaMosadiwatlala's house, they had to stop and wait for a while for a young herder and his cattle to pass. The herd had almost shut the narrow street. It must have been twenty or so heads. Moroke wined the window for the dust not to get into the car. He looked at how the young man proudly prodded the herd, how he called some by their names and how they obeyed him. He saw how well they looked. There was a cloud of dust after the road was cleared.

The whole village was like that at sunset. Cattle, sheep and goats had to be in the kraal before darkness settled. Young girls were also starting to make fires outside, to cook. Some warmed water for the men who toiled during the day to wash.

"We can go," Moroke told his companions.

"Turn left at that gum tree and proceed down towards the river. Be careful because this road is not really a road. The car might fall into a donga and get trapped. I'm too old to struggle getting cars out of dongas. You are also in clean clothes. Drive slow. Kedibone's grandmother's house is the fourth one on the right, the one with the blue door and window frames."

A handful of people, mainly elderly women, were gathered at MmaMosadiwatlala's house. Eyes darted towards the three people who got out of the car, but mainly at Mroko, the familiar one among the three, as they entered the house.

The old woman looked drained. She looked more aged than earlier in the day. Her eyes were also red. She was sitting on an old sofa, with a light blanket over her shoulders. On either side were two women of more or less her age. She was holding an empty jug with her right hand.

She looked straight into Mroko's eyes.

"Rre Mroko, are you bringing bad news? Why do I have a bad feeling? What is happening to my granddaughter?" she asked.

The nurse and the clerk looked at each without saying a word.

"Mma, the doctors would like you to come to the hospital. These two people will take you there. This young woman is Sister Mathibela and this young man is Percy Koboekae. They both work at the hospital. I will not go back with you," Mroko said.

The old woman looked to her left.

"God, what are those doctors going to tell me?"

The woman on the left shrugged her shoulders.

"I think you must go, MmaMosadiwatlala. Your granddaughter has no other person to turn to. Please, wipe your face and go with them," the woman on the right said.

The old woman stood up and disappeared into the bedroom.

Mroko cast his eyes at the two people he brought to the village.

"Now that you have found Kedibone's grandmother. I'm leaving you. I left my home long before noon. I don't even know if my cattle are in the kraal. I must also report to the *kgosi* that I brought you here but that you were in a hurry to first report to him."

"Thank you very much, Rre Mroko," the young man said.

"Please remember to tell the old woman that MmaKobedi and two young women are at the hospital. It's not necessary for her to ask anyone here to accompany her," he said as he got out the door, putting on his hat.

MmaMosadiwatlala emerged from the bedroom.

"We can go," she said to the two strangers. And then she looked at the two women who had been sitting with her on the sofa.

"Will someone stay here and keep my candle burning? I don't know when I'm going to be back."

It was already getting dark when the car eventually got out of the village onto the tarred road, facing eastwards to the city of shining stones, big holes and broken dreams. As the tyre wrestled with the tarmac, the silence in the car became uncomfortable, quiet like a cemetery on a Sunday noon. Even the two colleagues were quiet as strangers who had just met. No one bothered to switch on the radio.

Something was surely happening, MmaMosadiwatlala thought, many things going on in her mind, emotions also raging.

“Wouldn’t they have told me if my granddaughter had died?”

“God of my fathers, what can be bigger than death,” she wondered.

The journey continued. The car seemed to be moving at a faster speed than many cars. Soon some lights appeared far in the east. It must be the city of Kimberley. The lights grew brighter until they found themselves entering the city through Schmidtsdrift Road.

Eventually the driver spoke.

“That road is full of kudos at night. Thanks God we haven’t collided with any.”

“God is great, my son,” the old woman replied.

The nurse remained silent.

On a Sunday evening, the Kimberley Hospital seemed as busy as any last Saturday of the month; ambulances coming in with screaming patients on stretchers and heavily expectant mothers holding their tummies as if babies were about to pop out.

The nurse and the clerk led the old woman through the waiting patients and their families through the wards, surgical and dressing rooms to an office where three people were sitting on the table. They seemed to have been waiting.

“Good evening. We are sorry to have taken to so long. The village is quite a distance from here,” the nurse said to a man who looked more important than the rest.

“This is Mrs Mosadiwatlala, she is our patient’s grandmother,” the nurse said, pointing to MmaMosadiwatlala.

Everybody extended a hand to her. The important white man first, then the two younger men. Also white.

The clerk was just about to leave when the important one ordered him not to.

“Percy, you’ll have to stay and assist the Sister with interpreting.”

The five staffers on the table looked at each other hesitantly. The important man took a sip of water. He looked at Sister Mathibela.

“Will you tell her why we have called her?”

The nurse realised that she had no choice under circumstances. She took a deep breath and bit her lower lip.

“*Mma*, we had been sent to ask you to come with us to the hospital because the doctors have a very important request to make. Your granddaughter is still alive but she is kept alive by machines. If these machines are switched off she will be no more. Do you understand what I have just said, *mma*?”

The old woman kept quiet.

They looked at each other again.

“I think she needs water,” the important man said.

The clerk poured a glass and passed it to Sister Mathibela. The old woman took a sip, and another. Tears started rolling down her face. She started shaking. Sister Mathibela stood up, got closer to her. She wrapped her arms around the old woman.

“These things happen, *mma*. Once God has made His decision, we can never question it. We just have to accept.”

At that time the important man pushed the forms and the pen towards the nurse and the old woman. Sister Mathibela ignored him.

“God is great, *mma*. Please be strong.”

Everybody looked at the nurse. Nobody defies the important man.

“Sister,” the important man called. His voice was firm and low.

The nurse looked.

“The forms must be filled. She must sign.”

He pushed them much closer to the nurse.

“*Mma*, unfortunately Kedibone cannot be kept on the machines forever. At some point, maybe even tonight, the machines will have to be switched off,” Sister Mathibela said to the old woman.

“I understand, my child. I have accepted that reality.”

“That’s good, *mma*. But there’s another thing.”

“What’s that, now,” the old woman asked.

“There are people who might die soon unless some vital body organs are transplanted in their bodies. These organs must be from people who have just died and would not need these organs once they have died. If you agree, some of Kedibone’s organs can be removed and be

transplanted into some of these people who have been waiting for these organs in order to live,” the nurse explained.

“My child, are you saying that my granddaughter will be buried without some of her body parts?”

“*Mma*, what I’m saying is that your granddaughter is practically not alive anymore. She will not make use of her organs anymore. There are people who need these organs in order to live. Some of them have been waiting so long that they are just about to die unless someone donates an organ. If you agree that some of Kedibone’s organs be donated to these people, you’d have given about seven people a second chance to live. Please, *mama*. Think about it.”

The old woman retrieved a handkerchief from her breasts, wiped her face. She looked at the forms and a pen in front of the nurse.

“Are these the papers that I must sign to give my granddaughter’s body parts to strangers?”

“Yes, *mama*,” the nurse said.

“But, I cannot read or write. Where must I do the cross?” she asked the nurse.

The nurse pointed out with all the spaces in the forms where the old woman had to make a cross and thumb print.

Everybody just looked like a spectator.

“Thank you. Can I get the forms now?” asked the important man.

“We don’t have much time. Sister, please take her upstairs to see her granddaughter. After that she must be taken back home. The surgeons will start doing their work tomorrow morning. Percy, please see if we have enough overnight rooms for the recipients. I have a list and telephone numbers. Please call all of them tomorrow morning.”

The important man shook the old woman’s hand.

“It was great meeting you, Mrs Mosadiwatlala. Unfortunately I have to attend to other matters.”

The old woman said nothing. Nobody in the room said a word.

After what could have been a minute or so, the two other men followed the important man.

The nurse held the old woman by the hand.

“Let’s go upstairs, *mama*. You have to see for yourself how Kedibone looks.”

MmaMosadiwatlala had never been in a lift before. She held Sister Mathibela’s hand tight as the lift went up and much tighter when it opened for them to exit.

It was the old woman's first time in the intensive care unit of the hospital. Just before entering the ward, they were required to wash their hands with sanitizer. Only two people were allowed in. The clerk remained outside.

"Sister, you know these are not visiting hours," said the nurse in charge of the unit.

Before Sister Mathibela could say something, the nurse in charge raised her left hand index finger.

"Oh, now I remember. It's regarding that patient the doctors have been talking about? Is the old woman the closest family member they could find?"

"Yes. This is MmaMosadiwatlala, Kedibone's grandmother."

"Okay, please come through. We have actually moved her to that corner. You can take her through," she said, pointing to the farthest corner, behind the curtains.

Sister Mathibela could feel the old woman's hand shaking.

"*Mma*, be strong. Put all in God's hands. He won't forsake you."

They got to Kedibone's bed, surrounded by green curtains.

"Are you ready, *mma*? Can I pull the curtains?" the nurse asked.

The old woman nodded.

The nurse pulled the curtain, slowly.

The old woman held the nurse's hand tighter. Tears flooded.

"Kedibone," the old woman called softly.

Kedibone just lay there, motionless. Eyes shut. She was breathing through a ventilator. There was also a monitor with a graph next to her bed.

Her face was covered in white bandages. Only her eyes, nose and mouth were not covered.

The nurse asked MmaMosadiwatlala if she wanted to see the rest of Kedibone's injuries.

She pulled the white sheet from her body. There were bruises and scars all over her body.

"She had four broken ribs and many internal injuries. She bled from the inside for a long time before she arrived at the hospital. Most of the injuries were to her head. It seems she was hit against the wall. At the moment she is brain-dead. That is why the doctors say they cannot save her life. This pipe that you see going into her mouth and nose is all that is holding her at the moment," the nurse explained.

Once light in complexion, now her whole body was blue.

“That devil killed by child. May God save her soul and forgive the murderer,” the old woman said.

“*Mma*, what are you saying?” the nurse asked.

“Anger will not bring my granddaughter back. I’m hurt. I feel like my heart has been pierced with a very sharp spear. But God said we must forgive our enemies. Who am I to judge? I’m old. I’m also sitting and waiting for the grave to swallow me. Sadly I buried her mother. Now it’s her turn. But who knows God’s ways?”

The old woman turned to her motionless granddaughter.

“Kedibone, I don’t know if you can hear me. But I want you to know that you will be in a better place. I wish I had better words to say. But God knows what’s in my heart. I love you as I have always loved you. You’ll always live in my heart. Very soon I’ll join you in heaven and we’ll be happy together again. Please greet your mother.”

The old woman started crying. Words did not come out. The nurse wrapped her arms around her.

“*Mma*, it’s okay. Let’s go.”

She held on to the bed. The nurse in charge of the intensive care unit realised that something was happening. She came walking fast.

“Sister, I see that you need help,” she said to Sister Mathibela.

“Let’s go, *mma*. It’s God’s will. There is nothing we can do. We must just accept. Please let’s go before we disturb other patients,” the nurse in charge said as the two pulled the old woman out of the unit.

Behind the closed door, in the waiting area, were the sofas where the clerk had been waiting.

“I’m sorry, my children. But this is not easy. She was my only child. Her mother died after giving birth to her. I have been living with her since she was an infant. I have no one. I can’t count her uncle,” the old woman said, trying to get herself composed.

“Have a seat, *mma*. Let me get you some water. Then we can leave,” the clerk said.

Sister Mathibela looked at the old woman. She was still shaking, tears still flooding.

The clerk came back with a glass of water.

“*Mma*, it’s almost midnight. If you want you can sleep at my house. We can then take you home in the morning,” the nurse suggested.

She looked at the clerk.

“Percy, aren’t you too tired to drive to the village and back to Galeshewe?”

“I’m tired, but it’s really up to our guest. I don’t mind anything under the circumstances,” he said.

“My children, I’d rather go home than stay a night here,” MmaMosadiwatlala said.

Larry Pickover picked up the newspaper at the gate, walked slowly to the carport and sat down.

“BRUTALITY: MAN ALMOST KILLS WIFE,” the front page headline screamed at him. He went to page three.

Diamond Fields Advertiser

February 22 1986

A 22-YEAR-old woman was rushed to the Kimberley Hospital yesterday early afternoon after she was beaten to near death by her customary law husband with his bare hands.

Kedibone Molehe was transported to hospital in the back of the bakkie of the traditional leader of the Bakhudu people, Kgosi Kgarubane, after her husband, Godknows Molehe, beat her to near death with his bare hands in their home in Dikhudung village, about 10 kilometres outside Kimberley on the Campbell road.

Northern Cape police spokesman, Brigadier Hansie Swart, said Molehe was apparently told at a local shebeen that his wife had been sleeping around and in extreme anger went home and attacked the defenceless woman.

“He beat her with his bare hands until she was unconscious. He then went to tell his neighbour, who then reported the matter to the village chief,” Swart said.

Apparently Molehe was apprehended by the village men while the chief, his right-hand man, and some local women transported the badly beaten woman to the Kimberley Hospital.

Upon arrival in the city, the chief reported the matter to the police and Molehe was arrested and charged with assault with the intent to do grievous bodily harm.

“The suspect is currently in police custody and will appear soon in the Kimberley Magistrate’s Court,” Swart added.

“My magtig,” he said to himself. *My goodness!*

He moved his finger on the outside of the cup. It felt little bit warm. He drank it all in one long gulp.

Since breaking away from the Batlhaping nation, Bakhudu people had never attracted that much attention before. Even the leader of Batlhaping, *Kgosi* Mothibi and his royal council had come to give support to the people they often referred to as *balala*, the poor commoners.

People had come from near and far to attend Kedibone Molehe's funeral. There were people with cameras and notepads. Some with microphones and headphones sitting in vehicles fitted with things that looked like flat dishes facing various directions in the sky.

Men and women, in lighter and darker skins, speaking in tongues other than the one spoken by the deceased and her mourners, had descended upon a village that bore only one sun-beaten road sign.

Ahmed Patel, the fat Indian man who ran the only general dealer shop in the village, had been making unprecedented profit since the Thursday preceding the Saturday of the funeral. His Dyna truck with its characteristic black diesel smoke, made trips daily to the wholesalers in Kimberley, unlike before when he'd simply pack up stock in the boot of his Datsun Mark II.

Suddenly he had to triple his stock of meat pies and soft drinks in cans too.

The weather report on Radio South Africa said the temperature in Kimberley and the surroundings would peak at thirty-five degrees Celsius. At half past six in the morning the villagers who had already gathered at the tent that had been perched in front of the Mosadiwatlala home could feel the wrath of the rising sun.

Reverend James Oswald, a missionary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, who had been only the third white resident in the village, clad in his black gown and a dog collar, led the men who carried the white coffin out of the house into the tent.

A younger woman with a wounded voice led with the hymn *Modimo wa boikanyo*, which meant "Our faithful God".

Modimo wa boikanyo, (Our faithful God,)

Re ikanya mo go wena,(we put our trust in You)

O gogile borraetsho (You have carried our ancestors)

Mo dinageng tsa lenyora (from hardships)

Mme re lopa ka tlhoafalo (now we are praying)

Matshego a re a bonyeng, (for the blessings)

O nne Modimo wa rona,(that You stay our God,)

Mothusi mo tshikatshikeng (our Saviour in tribulations)

Mo ditseleng tsa botshelo (in our journey of life)
Goga dikgato tsa rona, (please lead us)
Re tle re fitlhe kwa o teng (until we reach our destination)
Legaeng je re le batlang (the home we long for)

Re femele mo diphatseng. (protect us from harm)
Re se digelwe ke sepe, (that we may not go astray)
Re neye se re se tlhokang, (provide us with what we need)
Dijo le tse di aparwang. (food and shelter)

Thuso e re a e lopa (we ask for all these)
Mo botlalong jwa gago Rra, (in Your fullness, Lord)
Mme re tla go itshenkela, (we will seek You)
Re go direle ka metlha. (and serve You at all times).

The coffin was placed on stand made of six chairs facing each other, in front of the table from which the Reverend Oswald would preach.

He cast his eyes over the mourners, with the front row reserved for the immediate family, the Mosadiwatlala clan, with Kedibone's grandmother covered in a checked light blanket.

Once the hymn had come to an end, a young man, dressed in a black formal jacket and a tie, holding a hand-written in his hand, asked everybody to take a seat.

The programme director, called *moradisi* at funerals, was usually a respected individual in the village, sometimes a teacher or a person who works with documents, like a clerk or a court interpreter.

In the programme a neighbour had to be called to speak, and old man Moroke was the logical choice.

He began by narrating how the young couple came to set up a steel structure next to his house the other day.

“It was in January, if my memory is not failing me, when Molehe and his wife came to settle here. It was quite early in the morning. I remember very well that it had rained the previous night and it was going to again rain later. The soil was soft for us to work on. But I called more boys to come and help this young man because otherwise he would not finish before the rain came,” Moroke continued.

He went on and on about how good they were as neighbours.

“They were my children. Unfortunately they never had children of their own. But it was still too early to say. But whenever Molehe had problems with his wife, he’d come to me first because his father lived quite far, almost down the riverside. The two lived peacefully. Like all men in the village, Molehe would go and quench his thirst at Downhill. But otherwise he was a good boy. He respected everybody. He took care of his cattle and toiled at the diamond digging like all men his age. Kedibone was a good wife. Her house was always clean. You’d never get into that house and not have tea, no matter how early or late it was. She spoke to everyone with respect. Molehe never went out of that house in dirty clothes.”

At that time everyone was listening carefully.

“It was quite a surprise to me when Molehe came running to my house, saying that he had beaten his wife severely. It was really a shock. I am still shocked. But I must say that I have lost two good children. We are burying Kedibone today and her husband is in jail. I will not judge him. The courts and God will do that. They were both my children. *A me a kalo, багаетшо*,” he concluded. “That’s the little I can say.”

Moradisi kept on reminding the mourners, whom he referred to as *phuthego*, the congregation, that Kedibone was a young and energetic woman.

“We are bidding farewell to a young person, *багаетшо*. Let’s show that in the way we sing.”

When that songbird led with a well-known chorus, *Ga a yo mathata, fa Modimo A le teng*, which meant “There are no problems when God is with us,” the mourners indeed began celebrating life.

Then *moradisi* explained that there would be no item of *mooki*, the nurse, in the programme.

“As we know, *bagaetsho*, Kedibone was as healthy as all of us before she took her last breath.”

The *kgosi*, the father of the village spoke, asking for calm.

“I want to start first by acknowledging the presence of *Kgosi* Mothibi and his council in our village. Even though this is a sombre moment, we are pleased to have you here, *rraetsho*.”

Then he cast his eyes at his people.

“Dikhudu, children of Batlhaping, let us allow the law to take its course. What has happened here has caused pain in our hearts. It has left us with many questions. After this funeral we are going to consult with our ancestors. Our village must be cleansed. I also want to ask all of you not to forsake *MmaMosadiwatlala*. She is our mother. I don’t expect to see her with a bucket of water from the tap while there are young men and women in the village. All the children here must know that they are children to all adults, and that *MmaMosadiwatlala* must not run her own errands in their presence. We are here to bury our daughter, *bagaetsho*. Many things will be said later. *Pula!*”

And the villagers also replied by calling *pula*, “Let it rain!”

And then another hymn was sung to welcome the preacher to the fore.

Reverend Oswald read from his Setswana Bible.

“Revelations chapter twenty, verse twenty-one,” he began.

It was only him who held a Bible. There was no use to wait for people to look for the scripture.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with and be their God.

He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

The Reverend closed the Bible and started preaching. There were more people in tears when he concluded than when he started.

The procession to the graveyard was led by the Reverend Oswald and leaders of other churches.

After the Reverend Oswald had said “ashes to ashes” and asked the family to sprinkle soil on the coffin and say their gratitude to the villagers, *Kgosi* Kgarubane asked *Kgosi* Mothibi to have the last word before the mourners left the graveyard.

“We are all saddened, not only by the brutal killing of our daughter by our own son, but also by the taking that never stops. They came here and dug this land of our forefathers. They took all this land can give and left its wounds looking up to the skies,” *Kgosi* Mothibi said, pointing towards the river where the alluvial diamond diggings were taking place.

“Now they have disrespected us by taking organs from the body of our daughter. Don’t they know that we don’t cut out pieces from our people before we bury them?”

He took out a brown handkerchief, wiped his face and looked at the cameras that were focusing on him.

“Go well, Bakhudu. I just want you to know that I lack peace because of what is happening to us. Inside of me I’m like the raging waters of our river when the *kgwanyape* is angry. *Ke huduegile maikutlo*. Go well. May the ancestors plead with God to bring peace in our land. *Pula!*”

Pula, they said in response as they dispersed, going back to the Mosadiwatlalas to have something to eat.

Food eaten at the funeral is called *mogoga*, normally eaten without spoons and no salt added to it. After hurriedly washing hands on basins, one for the men and one for the women, placed at the gate, people queued for *mogoga*. Nobody went home on an empty stomach.

The following day men, usually the same *diphiri* who dug the grave, would come before the sunrise to pull down the tent. At the same time, women would wipe off ashes from the windows.

Larry Pickover grabbed the copy of the Diamond Fields Advertiser that Magdalena had placed on his bedside.

The picture on the front page, of happy teenagers celebrating their matric results caught his attention. He knew one of them. The boy in the middle was Jaco van Wyk, the son of

Marilyn. Larry used to teach in the same school with her until she died after waging a fierce fight against cancer for many years.

“She was such a darling,” he thought. The boy has done pretty well under his circumstances. It’s quite sad that his mother is not around to celebrate with him. His father is such a poor excuse for a parent. Had it not been for the farm he inherited, they’d be a welfare case.”

He paged through the newspaper, red pen in hand.

He pulled his face.

“Why do they use the word allegedly where they could have used apparently? The difference is huge. I think this new editor is an upstart.”

Magdalena knocked on Larry’s bedroom door.

“Was master saying something?” she asked.

“No, Magdalena. I’m talking to myself. Don’t worry,” he said.

He looked at the transistor radio on the headboard and remembered that it had run out of batteries.

“Magdalena.”

“Yes, master.”

“Please remember to add batteries to the shopping list.”

He pulled the drawer open and took out a writing pad.

“Dear Editor,” he started writing his letter.

“I have noted that you are ignoring my letters and I am seriously considering approaching the South African Press Council.”

He realised that the tea was getting cold.

PART TWO

Dating back to the days of the diamond rush in the 1800s, The Star of the West peeps through its rooftops into the Big Hole. Surrounded by buildings as old as the excavation itself, with the tramway passing along its hip, the joint is also a tourist attraction of some sort.

It also meant a lot to Piet, who entered its doors for the first time holding his father’s helmet when he was barely twenty. He too, was introduced to the place by his old man.

“Don’t bang the door of a new car, son. That one is an important rule in the man’s world,” Piet said to Jaco as they got out of the Isuzu, ready to enter ‘The Star’.

“Sorry, pa,” Jaco said, his voice lowered.

Piet led the way. He always preferred the upper floor. Maybe it had to do with the pure white old rails, or maybe not.

“I like the view of this artificial hill. You know, your grandfather used to tell me that before they dug up this hole, this place was once a kopje. Now this view gives me an idea of how this place could have been had there been no diamonds here,” Piet said.

Jaco nodded.

“Your grandfather brought me here for my first drink. But that’s many moons ago. Now it’s my turn to bring my one and only son here,” he said as they entered the bar.

Jaco was not sure what his father was going to order for him.

“I hope he doesn’t know that I’m drinking,” he thought.

Piet tried to raise his voice.

“This place is now playing the music for you young guys. Everybody is catering for the ‘younger market’ as if we the older guys don’t pay for what we eat and drink,” said Piet, raising hands and making inverted commas with his index fingers.

The Kimberley temperature in early January peaks around the mid to high thirties and in the early evening, most windows at ‘The Star’ were still wide open.

“Let’s sit next to the window, son.”

Piet led the way.

“For the man of the moment,” he said as he pulled the chair for Jaco.

“Congratulations, son! You have made me a very proud man today. I wish your mother was still alive to celebrate your achievement with us tonight.”

“Dankie, pa,” Jaco said. *Thank you, dad.*

Piet raised a hand for the waitress.

“Two Castle draughts, please,” he said.

Then he looked at his son, whose eyes were already on the *plank vloer*.

“You thought I didn’t know. Didn’t you?”

“I thought you didn’t know what, pa?”

“That you take beer, son.”

“Pa ...”

Piet ignored his son’s discomfort. The waitress brought the beer.

“Cheers to you, son.”

A man in khaki shorts, shirt, brown *velskoene* and socks going up to his knees, came up to the two men.

“Meneer Van Wyk. Hoe gaan dit?” he asked, extending a hand to Piet. *Mister Van Wyk. How are you?*

“Hennie, long time no see! How’s it going on the farm?” Piet tried to raise his voice above the music.

“We’ve had too much rain than we needed recently but life goes on. I can only guess that this is your son.”

“Yes. Meet my son, Jaco. He has passed matric with flying colours and we are here to celebrate,” Piet said.

The man extended a hand to Jaco.

“Congratulations, young man. I’m Hendrik de Klerk.”

“Jaco van Wyk... pleased to meet you.”

“Likewise.”

“Now what’s next?”

“I’m going to the University of the Free State,” Jaco said.

The man nodded.

“Not far from home. Good choice. I think you must also choose a career that’s not too crowded so that you can get around the Affirmative Action policy. If you are white in this country, you can only secure a job if you have a scarce skill. Otherwise the government will give the job to the black man.”

Piet looked at Jaco and moved his eyebrows.

The man looked at his wristwatch.

“Let me leave you two men alone. I need to see whether the Springboks are ready to defend the world cup. Enjoy your beer. I’m going to get myself Klipdrift and Coke.”

“Enjoy,” Piet said, taking a sip of the Castle draught.

“Hennie is not dumb, son. He might come across as a dumb-ass farm boy, but he has a degree in agricultural science and another qualification in business management. He knows what he’s talking about.”

He knocked on the right side of his head.

“Think, son. Think.”

Thandi Mzimela, the only daughter of Sister Margaret Mzimela who toiled at the busy Baragwanath Hospital in Diepkloof, Soweto, had grown into a beautiful young woman.

She was almost the same height as her mother. She also had an easy smile that belied her assertive character. Her white teeth were made perfect by her glowing dark skin. When she smiled, her dimples deepened. Her thick hair was always dark, shiny and neatly combed.

Unfortunately she had never met her father, hence she could not say whether it was thanks to his genes that she never gained weight no matter what she ate.

“I know you are beautiful, my girl. But right now I want you to focus on preparing for a better future. Boys will take your virginity away and give you a baby. They will dump you and move on to the next victim,” her mother said.

Thandi was a shy girl. But Sister Mzimela had always said that shy people are often scheming.

“They are quiet but they can do horrible things behind your back,” she always said about introverts.

But Thandi had not had a boyfriend. When other members of the Wesley Guild, the youth movement of the Methodist Church, started having relationships, she stayed at home.

One Friday afternoon when she was supposed to attend the usual meeting, she didn’t go and her mother was surprised.

“Thandi, aren’t you supposed to be at the church now?” Sister Mzimela asked.

“I’m not feeling well today, mom. I’ll go next week.”

Next Friday came and passed. And then the next one, followed by the other and so forth until Sister Mzimela pressed for an honest answer.

Thandi relented.

“Mom, I can’t go there because I’m not too comfortable with the way some boys are looking at me at the guild meeting.”

“Why don’t you tell your leaders?”

“Our leaders have boyfriends and girlfriends in the guild. They’ll simply laugh it off.”

That was Thandi Mzimela, a well-mannered girl who learned all the things that her mother had taught her.

Sister Mzimela was also brought up by a single mother who lost her husband when he was crushed by a moving commuter train on his way from work. She raised Margaret on a domestic worker’s wage and put her through high school, Margaret was later admitted for a nursing course at the Baragwanath Hospital.

After finishing the course, she met a young man from Delareyville in the Western Transvaal, Gopolang Ditiro, an intern. He was about to qualify as a medical doctor. He was two years younger than Margaret.

“This is arithmetic, Maggy. Don’t worry about numbers,” he used to say.

“I can’t date a younger man, even if I find him attractive.”

“Do you really believe that, Maggy? I have told you countless times that I love you. I don’t care about your age. What is two years anyway?”

One night Margaret Mzimela had found herself at the doctors’ quarters. The two had made love. In the middle of the night Gopolang asked his friend, Godfrey Kgomo, who was already a qualified doctor, to lend them his Peugeot 404. The car snaked through the city of Johannesburg.

Suddenly there was a siren and blue lights. They were being pulled over.

“Curfew,” Gopolang remembered.

In his heart he cursed the government. He cursed everybody who worked in the public service. He stopped the car.

“Good evening, Sir and ma’am. Are you aware that you’re not supposed to be in the city after ten o’clock?” asked the white sergeant.

Gopolang remembered that Godfrey kept his white coat and stethoscope in the boot. He had a plan that could get them out of trouble.

“I’m a doctor, officer. We are from Baragwanath Hospital. One of the patients that I have been taking care of is in a critical condition at home. All our ambulances are out. I’m using my private car to go and fetch him,” he said as he got out of the car to fetch the white coat and the stethoscope from the boot.

“And you ma’am? Who are,” asked the black constable.

“I’m Sister Mzimela. I’m off –duty, but Doctor Ditiro asked me to come and help him with the patient.”

The cops looked satisfied.

“Doc, there is not much traffic at this time of the night. Just be careful of the tsotsis,” the sergeant said.

“Thank you, officer.”

The Peugeot 404 got back on the road.

“I hate that black constable more. It was like he was waiting to be instructed to arrest us. The bloody fool,” Gopolang complained.

Margaret touched his left shoulder. She pressed it gently.

“Don’t let him get to you.”

They continued with their journey northwards until they got to Alexandra Township where they ended at a place where liquor was sold at all hours, albeit illegally.

“I have known this place since I was doing my first year at medical school. I don’t think it will ever get closed. The black police officers also buy here,” Gopolang said.

They bought three bottles of red wine.

“The other two I will sell. We all do that. Whoever comes here buys more and sells to others. This place is far,” he said.

When Margaret woke up, she had the headache of a decade, and it was already six o’clock in the morning. She had to report for duty at seven and did not have a freshly washed uniform.

“Gosh, what am I going to do now?”

“Honey, don’t you only need clean underwear and top?”

“Yes. Are you telling me that you’ll run to my home and pick them up? My mother will kill you. I even had to lie and say I was working double shift.”

“No, honey. While you are taking a bath, I’ll simply wash them and iron them dry.”

Gopolang was like that; fun-loving and caring. Always at someone else’s service. When he loved, he loved. When he made love, he made love with all his heart.

Little wonder then that Margaret was admitted to the intensive care unit after she found out that her prince charming had a string of girlfriends, all of whom were treated almost the same. She never loved a man again. A month later she realised that she was carrying his baby. She told him, but could see by his smile that he was not really happy. She was not surprised to hear that he suddenly took a transfer to Eastern Transvaal. She heard nothing from him until she heard that he had been buried.

“He was shot dead by a policeman who found him in bed with his wife,” they said.

Thandi understood why her mother had warned her against men.

“They will dump you and move on to the next unsuspecting victim,” her mother said so often that she could even predict when she was going to say that.

Sister Margaret had hoped that her daughter would study at Vista University in Soweto and would sleep at home every night. Now she had to go to Bloemfontein. But children are children. Once they have made up their minds that they want to leave home, there is very little a parent can do. After all, Thandi had never lived away from her mother at any time in her life; had not been out of Soweto for longer than three days at any point in time. The course that Thandi had decided to study was also not taught in most predominantly black universities. Admission into traditionally white universities was also a mountain to climb for pupils from township schools that lacked the most basic resources.

“Mom, I’m really looking forward to the university.”

“That’s good, my girl. After four years I expect you to come back to Soweto with a B Pharm degree from the University of the Free State. I can’t tell you where to work, but I’d be delighted if you can come and work at the hospital pharmacy at Baragwanath.”

In Soweto, the day before matric results are released is a day like no other. Body temperatures and blood pressure rise. Some parents sleep with one eye open, some don’t sleep at all. Some have nightmares. Some have the most beautiful dreams about their children’s bright future and end up staying awake until the break of dawn.

But for the youngsters who are waiting for their results, it’s a night vigil. Music is played until the early hours of the morning when the newspaper arrives bearing the news that would brighten their days or shatter their dreams.

Sister Mzimela was on night duty and she had told Thandi not to worry about going to queue for the Sowetan newspaper at the taxi rank.

“Around two o’clock patients are always asleep. I’ll go and queue outside for the paper,” she told her daughter.

Even though other youths from the neighbourhood would be going in groups to the filling stations and spaza shops at taxi ranks to wait for the newspaper to arrive in order to get their results, Thandi was glad that her mother relieved her of that duty.

“Ngi ya bonga ma,” she said. *I thank you, mom.*

By the time Sister Mzimela arrived at the Baragwanath taxi rank, across the Old Potch Road from the hospital, the queue was already twenty people long. About ten minutes after waiting for the paper to arrive, there were already fifteen or so other people behind her.

The spaza shop owner realised it was time to entertain the waiting customers. He switched the radio on. At that hour of the morning Johannesburg’s youth radio station, YFM, was dishing out one hit after another, resembling a juke box. But who cared? Music kept waiting

bodies moving from side to side, young hips gyrating and oldies feeling let down by age. Youngsters danced up a storm. One would never know whether it was because they knew already that they'd passed or whether they didn't care anyway. But danced they did.

When the white Nissan 1400 pick-up van arrived with thousands of copies of the Sowetan newspaper, the queue had grown dramatically. Numbering a thousand, even two, it snaked from the taxi rank, past the subway up to the St John's Eye Clinic. The spaza shop owner screamed at the top of his voice that they should be patient.

"There are enough papers for every one of you. As long as you have the money, you will get your paper. There's no need to push your neighbour. After the results you'll still need him."

Some laughed. Some jeered at him.

"Don't waste our time, *wena*. We want to know if our children have passed," said one man in his forties.

Sister Mzimela remained quiet and calm. She looked at the huge Baragwanath Hospital on her right. It looked like a sleeping giant, unlike on Friday and Saturday nights when many patients were wheeled in with scary injuries. She threw her eyes in the direction of the morgue. The end of the painful road, she thought.

"Maybe one day my daughter will work here as a pharmacist," she thought and smiled.

It was her time to get the paper. She paid, took the paper and walked away. She stopped at the gate and went in the security watch house.

"Sanibonani," she greeted. *Good morning*.

"I want to search for my daughter's name on this paper away from all those annoying nurses," she said to Baba Mthethwa, the night watchman.

"Who are you talking about? Thandi? That one has passed," Baba Mthethwa said, throwing his hands around.

Within seconds Sister Mzimela had found her daughter's name. Thandiwe Rose Mzimela had passed with a matric exemption, taking three subjects with distinctions.

"God is great," she said in soft voice, almost whispering. Tears started flowing. Baba Mthethwa hugged her.

"Your daughter did well, my child. I told you she had passed."

"Ngi ya bonga, baba," she responded. *I thank you, Sir*.

She wiped her tears and walked back to the ward. But her eyes were still fixed on the newspaper.

“Sister, you’ll hit the walls if you don’t look where you’re going,” said Peter, the ambulance driver.

“She must have passed. Didn’t she?” he asked.

“Oh, Peter. You are God-sent. Yes, my little girl has passed with flying colours. I want to ask the Sister-in-charge to go home. Will you be able to drop me off at home if you’re not busy?” she asked.

“This is you and Thandi’s big day, Sister. I’ll do anything for you. I’ll be at the ambulance station.”

It didn’t take long before Sister Mzimela got to the ambulance station, finding Peter drinking coffee.

“We can leave once you have finished drinking coffee.”

The big orange and blue letters bearing the words “Universiteit van die Vrystaat/ University of the Free State,” shone bright in the sun and greeted everyone entering the university’s main gate on the R64 road.

It was just after eight o’clock in the morning and there was already a queue of vehicles going through the security checkpoint. The visitors’ entrance had the longest queue.

Judging by registration plates on cars, people bringing their children to university came from near and far. Some cars bore registrations plates from Lesotho, the Eastern Cape, some even from the former homelands of Bophuthatswana and Transkei.

“Winds of change,” Piet thought.

Just a decade earlier one could hardly see a black face near this place. Now young black people are all over, in their colourful attire like peacocks. Hair styles ranged from table tops to imported Indian hair sewn into kinky black hair.

Once the bastion of Afrikanerdom and drawing its labour mainly from farming towns of the Free State, Bloemfontein was fast ripening itself to be reaped and enjoyed by all and sundry. Institutions of learning had their doors reluctantly opened to all races, much to the annoyance of those who had them exclusively as their own at the time of racial segregation.

Youths with rucksacks and student cards hanging on lanyards, walked past the vehicles through the turnstiles into the university premises. Seemingly they knew their way around the campus.

“Son, this is the day we have been waiting for. I wish your mother was still alive to see you walk through the gates of the university,” Piet said to Jaco.

“I’m very grateful, *pa*. I also wish ma was still alive to see all this.”

He wiped a tear with his right hand.

“You see, son. I and your mother never had the opportunity to study at a university. At your age I was doing the national service and then I worked in your grandfather’s shop until I drove ambulances. I have been a farmer most of my life.”

“I’ll make *pa* proud,” Jaco said.

“You better, son.”

After the few minutes of stop-go, stop-go it was eventually Jaco and Piet’s turn to go through the security checkpoint.

Coming straight from Diamantveld High School in Kimberley to the university, Jaco had never seen an institution as imposing as the University of the Free State. There were streets and avenues within the campus, buildings everywhere, people here and there minding their own business, cars and bikes parked all over the place.

“*Pa*, this place is huge. It’s almost like a town!”

“Yes, son, it’s huge. It’s bigger than many small towns in the Northern Cape. They have bank teller machines, restaurants, pubs, even rugby and cricket fields too.”

They stopped to ask for directions. The young man who helped them said he was from the town of Welkom in the gold fields. He was a third year commerce student.

The Isuzu double cab parked in front of Huis Verwoerd, a male residence named after Dr Hendrik Verwoerd, the Prime Minister of South Africa between 1958 and 1966.

“This place will be your home for the next four years, son. I want you to get settled first. Your scooter will be here in two weeks.”

“That’s okay, *pa*. I must still find my way around this huge place,” Jaco said.

“You must also see if it will be safe here. This place is now open to all kinds of people, even those who are not used these sorts of facilities. Your scooters might disappear sooner than you can blink, son.”

Jaco ignored what his father had just said. Instead he looked at the building that was about to swallow him. He looked at the well manicured lawns, at the students going about their business with sling bags on their shoulders and rucksacks on their backs.

They started taking his bedding, clothes, books, family portrait and transistor radio to his room.

“I can’t believe you have brought the Diamantveld blazer with, son!”

“*Pa*, please.”

“Son, you must grow up. You are no longer in high school. Bringing a high school blazer to the university shows that you are refusing to let go of your childhood. You are now becoming

a young man. Please, don't take this blazer into your room, son. Let me take it back home. Please?"

"Okay, *pa*."

"Have you used your new bank card yet?" Piet asked.

"Pa gave me some money. I have no reason to use the card now, *pa*."

Piet shook his head.

"Son, I'm surprised you haven't rushed to the machine to try out your first bank card. There is enough money in there for you to survive the whole month."

"I'll walk to the shops tomorrow morning, *pa*. I still want to feel the place out first. And maybe make a friend or two."

The Van Wyk men shook hands.

"Not a Sunday must pass, son. Not a single Sunday. You hear me?"

"What is *pa* saying?"

"I heard there is NG Kerk in this campus. Don't let one Sunday pass without you setting a foot at the church unless you are bedridden, son. You know how I have raised you."

"I promise you, *pa*."

The Isuzu roared.

"See you in two weeks, son."

"*Tot siens, pa*," he bid his father goodbye.

The lecture hall was three times the size of a class at Diamantveld High. Half the time Jaco could not hear what the professor was saying, even though his very first university lecture was conducted in Afrikaans.

Perhaps next time I must sit on the front row, he thought.

The feeling was overwhelming. The difference was amazing. No bell rang for them to get to class and for the period to end. No one said anything about students making noise. The professor addressed them as ladies and gentlemen, not boys and girls.

But much to Jaco's disappointment, all students in his class were white and Afrikaans-speaking. One of his teachers at Diamantveld had told him to expect mixed race classes.

"Next year you are going to interact with people of all races and languages. If you are wise, you'll use the opportunity to learn other people's cultures and broaden your mind," the teacher told them at the matric farewell.

His English teacher in standards nine and ten openly admired Thabo Mbeki for his command of the English language and how he extensively quoted William Butler Yeats and Shakespeare in his speeches.

Thabo Mbeki was the country's deputy president when Jaco was in Standard Nine and became president the following year when Jaco did matric.

His English teacher had printed and made copies of Thabo Mbeki's inaugural speech for all the pupils.

"My children, I want you to look beyond skin colour and judge a man by the content of his character. I'm borrowing here from the great American civil rights leader, Martin Luther King Junior. When you read Mister Mbeki's speech, you'll see the beauty of the English language and how this wise man has carefully selected words to emphasise things such as power, compassion etcetera," the teacher said with pride in his face and an air of confidence.

Jaco secretly hoped to have a black friend or two. In almost every well dressed black man who spoke English well on television, he saw Thabo Mbeki.

However, his father despised the president. A black Englishman, his father called Thabo Mbeki.

Now at the university he saw fewer black faces than he expected. And they spoke languages he could hardly understand.

Towards the end of his first week on campus he was waiting for his turn to use a card payphone and the guy in front of him spoke English. He was wearing a shirt and formal trousers and had neat short hair. Maybe Thabo Mbeki looked like that when he was younger, Jaco thought. But the accent told the guy he was not South African. Perhaps he was Zimbabwean.

"Sorry, I took too long," the guy said when he realised Jaco had been waiting for a while to use the phone.

"No problem, Sir."

He couldn't believe he had just called him Sir. But it was too late to retract what he just said. The guy was already gone.

A lazy early evening walk from a convenience store across the road from the university was spoiled by a sudden drizzle.

The evening was fine with warm temperatures and a clear sky when Thandi went out to buy a phone card and True Love magazine.

After she had just left the store, she passed two young men she knew from the university. One of them was a member of the Student Representative Committee. She knew him because he was one of the loudest during students' general meetings and was one of the two black members of the SRC.

“Hey, Thandi! How're you? Please come join us. We'll have fun,” Mister SRC said.

Thandi just looked ahead as if she didn't hear him.

Mister SRC pressed the horn of the university car he was driving. She still ignored him. He decided to drive towards her. He stopped the car right in the middle of the road and put the hazards on.

“Please join us, man. It's Friday evening. What are you going to do at the res?”

She couldn't ignore him any longer.

“I can't hear you. Your music is too loud,” she said.

Mister SRC's friend and a female companion were sitting at the back. The man had a green bottle in his hand, probably beer. The female companion, who already looked sloshed, was holding a bottle containing something that looked like cider.

Mister SRC lowered the music volume and repeated his question.

“I'm going to my room. I have an assignment to work on. I'm sorry. Maybe next time,” Thandi said.

The man at the back opened the window.

“Hey *wena* Zulu girl! Loosen up, man! What's the matter with you?”

Mister SRC turned to the back and reprimanded his friend.

“Thandi, I'm sorry. He is like that when he is drunk. But, please join us.”

She still said no and carried on walking. For some few metres Mister SRC drove next to her, hoping she'd change her mind. He gave up.

Thandi was getting used to life far away from home. Bloemfontein was nothing like Soweto. But even though she lived on campus in town, she went to church in the township on Sundays. She preferred the traditional Methodist Church where the singing and preaching was done in Sesotho and IsiXhosa. Of course there were interdenominational services on

campus but nothing was like the church she grew up in. She wanted to see women of the church in the red and white uniforms.

She had never been a club person, and when others went out clubbing on Fridays and Saturdays she would stay indoors.

That evening as she walked down the road back to campus from the store, she found herself singing Brenda Fassie's *Too late for mama*. She stopped herself midway, wondering why she was suddenly singing that song with its bitter-sweet message.

Then the heavens started opening up. Goodness! She only had a sleeveless top on, and her residence was still some good three hundred metres away. She'd be drenched by the time she got there.

Suddenly a motorbike pulled in front of her.

"Hey, hop on! I know it won't protect you from the rain but it will get you to res a bit faster," a young white man said.

Without a second thought she jumped on the back.

"You'll have to hold me with both hands, otherwise you'll fall."

After a minute the bike pulled in front of Huis Verwoerd. By then the drizzle had become light rain.

Thandi was not sure whether to wait at the entrance of Huis Verwoerd until the rain stopped or thank the stranger that gave her a ride and leave. She looked at him with an unsure smile.

"Thank you very much," she said.

"No problem," he said, extending a hand.

"My name is Jaco."

"My name is Thandi. Pleased to meet you."

"Likewise."

He asked her to stick around until rain had stopped. Although she felt awkward standing at the entrance of a residence in which only white males lived, she agreed because the only other way was to get wet and maybe even catch flu.

They started talking about what they were studying and where they came from.

"I've never met anyone from Soweto before," he said.

"I've also never met anyone from Kimberley!"

They both laughed.

Jaco asked her to wait for her while he went in.

He came back holding a sweater in one hand.

“I think you better wear this. It’s not that warm anymore. You’ll give it to me when we get to your res,” he said.

She looked at him as if to ask if he was sure.

Diamantveld Hoërskool was written on the blue and white sweater.

She took it and wore it.

“Thanks.”

The rain stopped and they walked to Huis Madeleine.

Though there were not many people outside residences on campus at that time, Thandi felt as if she was being watched while walking with a white guy.

The university community was not racially integrated. Black students and lecturers were few and lived on campus as though they were trespassing. They were members of the campus community but not really part of it.

On the other hand, white students and lecturers seemed to have fun. They played rugby and cricket, had barbeque and drank beer on weekends. The students had small cars and bikes and most attended classes conducted in their own language. Very few of them had black friends, and when they spoke to their black counterparts, it was on matters they could not avoid talking about such as course content and work.

Thandi took off the sweater when they got to the entrance of her residence and gave it to Jaco.

“Thank you very much, Jaco. I’d be wet and freezing now had you not stopped to help me.”

“Don’t worry. It’s okay. I’ll see you some other time. Have a good night.”

“You too.”

She opened her arms wide, readying to hug him, only to remember that this was a white guy. She was pleasantly surprised when he moved closer to hug her.

“Goodnight, Thandi.”

“Thanks and goodnight, Jaco.”

The girl at the reception shook her head as Thandi approached.

“Wena, makgowa a mo a tlile go go bolaya,” she said. *White people in this place will kill you.*

Thandi ignored her and walked through to her room.

In her room Thandi was watching a repeat of Generations. It was her routine. After taking a bath and having breakfast, she would go to study for two hours before coming back to the room to watch all five episodes of her favourite soapie that she could not watch during the week. After that she would go to Mimosa Mall to watch a movie. All her Saturdays were like that.

A commercial break had just ended when the intercom signalled.

“Thandi you have a visitor,” the lady at the reception said.

She went downstairs to find Jaco waiting for her. She was taken slightly aback by the visit.

“Hi, Jaco.”

“Hi, Thandi. How are you?” he asked.

“I’m well and you?”

“I’m doing fine. Sorry to bother you. I was wondering whether you’re in the mood for a walk. I need a few things at the store across the road.”

She was not too sure what to make of this request, but she agreed to go with him.

Since his arrival in Bloemfontein, Jaco had not made many friends. He spent most of the time studying. Although he played rugby at the Diamantveld High School, he had not yet joined the university’s rugby side.

The last and only time he went out with his roommate and other students they went to a club, had beer and got arrested for public drinking. They were all locked up Park Road police station.

The cell in which they were locked up reeked of urine, alcohol, tobacco and sweat all at the same time. Once police officers had locked them in, some people, probably pickpockets, claimed to know one of them and beat him just for fun. They were so scared none of them intervened. Anyway, four of them could not stand up against a dozen others if a black and white war were to break out in the cell.

They did not fall asleep from midnight until they were released at six in the morning, and walked back to the campus without saying a word to each other. Upon arrival in his room, Jaco went to take the longest shower he had ever taken in his life. After that he took all the clothes he had on the previous night, except the shoes, put them in a plastic bag and threw them in a dustbin. He never told his father about the experience.

Since then he never left campus at night. When others went out to rugby matches at the Springbok Stadium, he stayed in and concentrated on his studies or watched the same game

on television. Otherwise he would go to Kimberley on Friday afternoons and get back to campus late on Sundays.

They had been walking for two minutes without a word when Thandi asked a question.

“So tell me how you knew that you’d find me at the res.”

He laughed but quickly put his hand on his mouth.

“I just guessed. But I had an idea that you’re not the type that goes out a lot,” Jaco said.

“What made you think that I don’t go out?” she asked.

“Yesterday when I met you most people were out having fun in town and you’re going to your room!”

“Don’t think you know me mister! What’s your surname by the way?”

“Van Wyk.”

“Hallo, Meneer Jaco van Wyk! Hoe gaan dit?” *Hello, Mister Jaco van Wyk. How are you?*

They both laughed at her attempts to speak with an Afrikaans accent.

“My surname is Mzimela. But don’t think I’m related to the Minister of Prisons, mister!”

He put his hands together and stood in front of her.

“Here, ma’am. Cuff me and throw me in any of your jails. I’m guilty of finding your company great!”

“Be careful what you wish for, mister. Some wishes do come true,” she said, arms akimbo.

They were still standing on the pavement, facing each other when a white Citi Golf pulled up next to them. Four white young men were inside.

“Wat gaan aan hierso?” the one sitting next to the driver asked. *What’s going on here?*

“We’re chatting,” Jaco said.

“Voetsek, man! Chatting se ma se gat! Aren’t there enough girls to chat with for you to pick up this one?”

Jaco felt hot under the collar.

“Wat sê jy?” *What are you saying?*

“Ek sê chatting se ma se gat,” he repeated. *I’m saying chatting’s mother’s arse!*

All occupants in the Citi Golf laughed. The one behind the driver showed Jaco and Thandi the middle finger. The car pulled off with its occupants laughing out very loud.

Jaco knew then that if he was going to be friends with Thandi, he had to prepare himself for abuse and insults.

Thandi was also not sure whether it was a good idea to walk around the campus with a white man.

They proceeded to the convenience store without saying much to one another. But Thandi realised that Jaco was shaking. She also wasn't sure what would be the right thing to do.

How would he react if she were to hold his hand and say all will be well?

At the store Jaco offered to buy her a magazine, drink, phone card, bubble gum or whatever she needed.

On their way back to campus, Jaco kept looking around like a mouse on the run from a hungry cat. They walked past Huis Verwoerd up to Huis Madeleine.

"After what just happened, I'm not sure whether to hug you or not," she said.

He opened his arms and wrapped her.

"I'm sorry, Thandi. I'm very sorry. I had no idea this was going to happen."

"It's okay. You obviously think well of everybody."

His bottom lip quivered.

"I'll see you again, Thandi. Have a good weekend."

"Jaco?"

"Yes."

"You don't have to see me if you don't feel like seeing me. No one wants to be hated for nothing."

He kept quiet and left.

Later in the evening Jaco came back. Thandi came downstairs to see him. They walked through the campus, sat under the tree and kissed.

They did so again on Sunday evening.

Jaco and Thandi had been seeing each other for a while when out of the blue Piet arrived in Bloemfontein on a Friday afternoon.

His father would not just have arrived without having called before. It was either he was in town for an urgent meeting or there was something serious that he wanted to talk about.

“Hallo, *pa*.”

“Hallo, *seun*.”

Something was not quite right in the way his father looked at him. They were to visit his father’s friend, also Jaco, in another part of the city. On the way Piet told him of a phone call he received from the university from a concerned adult.

“*Pa*, who is this concerned adult?”

“*Seun*, it’s not much about the concerned adult as it is about you.”

The concerned adult told Piet that his son was going out with a black girl and that he had become a pariah on the campus.

“I’m worried that they hate him so much they’ll end up causing him harm,” the concerned adult told Piet on the phone.

They were going to see this other friend because he was the first person Piet called after the concerned adult hung up the phone.

“*Seun*, Oom Jaco thinks I must open up and that things have changed. He thinks you can go out with whoever you are in love with,” Piet said to his son.

Jaco kept quiet. He had no idea that a simple and beautiful act of love could turn his little world upside down.

“Can’t *pa* and everybody just accept that I met someone I love?”

“I want to accept, *seun*. I really want to,” Piet said.

“Then what’s stopping *pa* from accepting? Isn’t love a natural thing?”

Jaco was weeping, almost uncontrollably, when they arrived in the quiet suburb of Daan Pienaar.

Piet was conflicted. This was not easy. Perhaps if his wife was still around, they’d put their heads together. But he was all alone with a young man high on forbidden love.

Piet’s friend went to open the gate for them and immediately realised what was going on. He asked Jaco to stay in the car while he and Piet went inside the house.

He had only one message for Piet; to accept that love is an unstoppable thing.

“The only battle must be against your own prejudices, my pal. It’s not going to be easy. But that’s the only battle you can fight and know that God is on your side.”

They went back to the car. Jaco was no longer crying. He was looking at the two men who were walking towards him. He trusted Oom Jaco. He was the only person he knew who could tell his father uncomfortable truths and his father would still go back to him for advice.

“*Jong man*, be easy on your dad. *Asseblief, seun*. I and your dad were raised in a time different from yours. Be easy on the old man.”

Thandi was ready as early as half past six on the day she and Jaco were to visit his father in Kimberley.

The sun seemed to rise slower than usual, the hands of the clock also moved with reluctance.

“Tumi, how do I look?” she asked her roommate.

“Will a white old man see even if you have taken your best clothes to meet him, my friend? Please, don’t stress. You look amazing,” Tumi said.

But Thandi kept on going back to the mirror.

Her pitch black afro was beautiful and shiny. Her ebony skin offset her pure white teeth when she smiled. Her friends had always called her smile a ‘Colgate smile’.

The intercom. It was Jaco. Time to go.

“You’re not taking an overnight bag, my friend? Kimberley is not around the corner,” Tumi said.

“No, my friend. We’re just going for the day. We’ll be back here this afternoon.”

Jaco was in his jeans and a long sleeve Griquas shirt.

“You could have told me to wear my Pirates shirt,” Thandi said to him.

It was Thandi’s first time going to Kimberley. She had heard a lot about the place from her roommate, who happened to be from Barkly West, about thirty kilometres north of Kimberley. But she was in no mood to go and see the famous Big Hole. All that was in her mind was meeting Jaco’s father and impressing him. As far as she knew he had to impress her mother too.

They arrived in Kimberley just before ten o’clock. They came across military vehicles following each other. It must have been twenty or so.

“My father was once a serviceman,” Jaco said.

Thandi did not know.

“It seems there are many things I don’t know about your family, J. What more are you going to tell me? That your grandparents lived in Soweto?”

The suburb of Hadison Park looked more dead than quiet. There was hardly a soul walking on the street. Apart from a rickety Volkswagen Beetle that smoked and roared on behalf of all

cars that were either out of town or locked in garages, they passed no other vehicle until they got to Number 33 Pepperboom Street.

Piet was not at home when Jaco and Thandi arrived. Jaco used his keys to open the gate and the house. He was still showing Thandi around when Piet arrived.

The Isuzu, it had its own sound. Jaco could hear its sound coming from the café at the corner.

By the time Piet got out of the bakkie, Jaco and Thandi were already standing on the stoep, waiting for him.

“*Hallo, seun. Hallo, ma’am. You must be Thandi.*”

“Good morning, Sir. Yes, I’m Thandi. You must be Jaco’s father. I’m pleased to meet you.”

“Same here.”

Jaco was pleased the greetings and introductions went well. But he became worried when his father decided to leave immediately afterwards. Normally Piet would sit and have a conversation with his son the whole day.

“The agricultural union has an urgent meeting, son. I hope to get back on time,” he said when he left.

After three hours since he had left, Jaco’s cellphone signalled that he had a new message. It was his father.

“*Seun, I’m trying. You too can see that. Please be patient with me. I won’t be back at home until you send me a message saying you have left. I hope your girlfriend will understand.*”

Jaco turned to Thandi.

“I told you that my father is struggling with acceptance. Please be patient with him,” he said, showing Thandi the message from his father.

Thandi was happy her presence was bringing change in the way Piet was thinking and how he viewed other people. She also respected Jaco for following his heart amid all the risk that accompanied their relationship.

They went to Spar to buy vegetables. She cooked a meal that could last Piet days. She and Jaco cleaned the house. He sent his father a message saying they were cleaning the house and cooking for him. They would leave in three hours. They had lunch. The best Jaco had at home since his mother’s death. They went to his room and made love. Thandi made the bed. They took a shower. She made sure the bathroom was spick and span. He sent his father another message saying they were leaving. He hoped things would get better with time. He loved him. He loved Thandi too.

Jaco and Thandi had been to Kimberley twice, with his father staying most of the time in his bedroom or away on the farm, when Oom Jaco called him.

“*Seun*, I’d like to see you.”

Oom Jaco told him that Piet was not coping.

“It’s not easy to teach old dog new tricks, my son. Your dad and I were raised in a segregated society. Though in theory he might not have problems with you having a black girlfriend, in real life it’s not that easy.”

Jaco found himself at a crossroads. He either had to stop going to Kimberley with Thandi so that he could put his father at ease, or abandon a blossoming relationship.

Most students had accepted the love affair and some were even rumoured to be aspiring towards mixed race relationships. Jaco and Thandi had become a centre of attraction and a ray of hope for an integrated society. In a space of three months students started chatting to them on the avenues and parks on campus. Jaco had a few friends asking him how he managed to get himself a black girlfriend. Some had annoying questions like whether sex with a black girl was different. But one certain thing was that students liked what they saw and Jaco and Thandi enjoyed the attention.

Ending the relationship was not an option. Suddenly some militant spirit overwhelmed Jaco. If his father wanted to live like an ostrich with his head buried in the sand, Jaco would root it out and let him face the inevitable reality.

The following weekend he and Thandi went to Kimberley again.

Jaco could sense that his father hadn’t just called him into the kitchen. This was the only room in the house in which important matters had been discussed throughout all the years in the Van Wyk household, mainly because of the proximity to the fridge than anything else. No word had been exchanged between the two men in roughly five minutes since they had entered the kitchen.

“Trouble is certainly brewing here,” Jaco thought.

Indeed there was trouble. Even the air could sense the tension that was evident in every look and breath.

“Son, this must be the last time I see that girl in my house.”

“But pa doesn’t know Thandi. How can pa simply say he doesn’t want her in this house,” asked Jaco, in a tone full of surprise.

His father's voice got louder.

“Shut up, boy! I am sick and tired of you bringing that girl here. This is my house and today I am telling you for the very last time. I don't want to see her in this house again,” he said, banging the kitchen table so hard that the echo could still be heard seconds later.

He wiped a bead of sweat from his forehead with his right thumb, his eyes red as flame.

Jaco had never seen his father that angry before. Nevertheless, the young man intended to stand his ground that day even though he felt a wave of hatred towards his father for seeing and judging another person just because she had a different skin colour.

He bit his lower lip and closed his eyes. He took a deep breath and then spoke.

“Will pa please listen to me? Thandi and I are in love and there is very little, if anything, that you or any other person in the whole world can do about it. Please, learn to live with it.”

Piet looked away, shook his head, lowered his voice and firmed his speech.

“Son, I lived for thirty years before you were born. I have been in the army. I have sold fish and chips at your grandfather's shop. I have driven an ambulance up and down Galeshewe Township. I have seen many things that you are yet to see in this world.”

He paused to take a sip of vodka that he had been drinking non-stop since Jaco had brought his girlfriend home. He continued.

“That rainbow nation nonsense that has messed your tiny head is not the reality. It is for television and tourists who know nothing about this country. It is a make-believe thing, my boy. In reality we are different people. That is why races had to be kept apart in this country,” he said and paused for another minute.

He took another sip of vodka.

Then, loudly again: “I said take that girl out of my house now or I will physically squeeze life out of her now. Do you hear me, Jaco? Do you hear me, son?”

Piet was shaking as he spoke. Sweat was all over his face that had suddenly turned pink, making him look like someone who could just take a gun and shoot the whole world before turning it on himself.

“Pa, you are scaring me.”

“Scared or not, I don't care. Just take that bitch of yours out of my house now. I say now. Do you hear me? I say now!”

Jaco shook with disbelief.

“Pa, what kind of a Christian are you? You brought me up in the church. You never said Dominee Koornhof was ever wrong when he said that all humans were created in the image

of God. Now you have a problem with me having a black girlfriend. Pa, do you even hear yourself as you speak?"

If anger were flames, his father could be spitting enough to burn the whole house down to ashes.

"I can't believe this. My own son brings a black girl into my house and then questions my Christian faith. Are you saying that I am a hypocrite, son? Is that what you are saying?"

"Pa, that is not what I am saying. I was just saying that I find it ironic that pa never displayed racist tendencies before."

"What? Are you now calling me a racist? Are you calling your own father a racist, boy?"

"No, pa. I am not saying that pa is a racist."

"Then what are you saying?"

"I am saying that pa takes me to the church where they teach us things that pa never objected to. Then pa turns around and acts as if these things they are teaching us in church do not matter anymore."

"Son, are you saying that your own father is a racist? Answer me."

"Pa is not a racist. Pa is showing racist tendencies."

"What the hell is this thing called tendency? What is a tendency? Okay, don't answer that one. But now tell me: are you saying that I am a racist?"

"Pa, by hating Thandi just because she is black makes pa a racist. Yes, pa is a racist."

His father said nothing. He clenched his fists. Jaco could hear him breathe in and out. He knew that what he said was momentous. He had passed judgment on the character of a man who had brought him to this earth and had given him everything in life. He moved a little bit further from his father so that he was not within reach in case a *warm klap* came his way.

Then slowly Jaco gathered some courage and strength during his father's brief silence. He suddenly felt that he was ready for whatever might come his way.

"Pa, I have said it. Now what are you going to do? Kill me? Throw me out of the house? Disown your only son? Say it, pa. Tell me what you are going to do to me now. Are you going to throttle me? Say it, pa. Say it."

His father could not believe that his son could even talk to him like that. He shook his head for the umpteenth time, cleared his throat and then, in a lower and firmer voice he began.

"You have hurt me, boy. Today you have called me a racist."

"Yes, pa. I have said it."

“Son, I have not finished talking.”

“Yes, pa.”

“Hey, I said I haven’t finished talking. Where did you learn all these bad manners? Don’t you know that you cannot cut an older person’s speech?”

“*Askies*, pa.”

“*Askies se voet, man!* Don’t push me, boy. Don’t make me say things I will regret saying.”

The young man gathered more courage.

“Say it, pa. Say it. I’m ready to hear it, pa?”

“Don’t push me, boy.”

“I am pushing you, pa. I am pushing you. Can’t you see that I am pushing you? Say it. What is it? You want to tell me that you are not my real father? You want to tell me that I’m adopted?”

His father kept quiet again. He looked away and wiped sweat from his face.

“Son,” he began in a lower voice.

Jaco knew that when his father was very angry he would lower his voice.

“Son, I thought that having the heart of a black woman pumping blood in your body was painful enough for me to live with. Now you are bringing that girl into my house.”

“What did pa say?”

Piet could say no more than he had just said. In those two sentences, he had already said enough for two decades.

He banged the backdoor as he left. All that Jaco could hear was his father banging the door of his Isuzu bakkie.

When Jaco looked out through the window, the nose of the Isuzu was exiting through the yard. He watched as the gate slowly closed. He watched every movement of the gate motor. He saw it come to a halt. He wished it could open again, that the nose of the Isuzu could emerge, that his father could come back and say ‘Son, what I said was not true’. But the gate was shut.

In just a few minutes Jaco’s world had turned upside down. What he thought was the truth he just found out to be lies, and the truth seemed too much to digest in such a short space of time. The young man wished it had all been a bad dream, and that all would things would return to normal. But the reality was too insistent to vanish.

Sitting on the edge of the bed with her face between her hands, Thandi was the first to speak after Jaco had closed the door behind him.

“I heard everything, J.”

His eyes widened.

“You did?”

“Yes. I did. And you’re not going to lie to me. I know your father doesn’t want me in his house. He doesn’t want me in your life either.”

“Yes, but . . .”

“There is no ‘but,’ J. I heard every word your father said. He hates me for no other reason except that I’m black. He walked out of his own house because of me. I’m packing my few things in my little bag and getting the hell out of this place now,” she said, hands flying at all directions.

“Thandi, please wait.”

“J, I’m not going to fight racism at the university and still have it get into my love life. When the hell am I going to get peace of mind? I said I’m getting the hell out of this place now!”

Jaco paced up and down the bedroom, both hands squeezing his skull as if to stop his brain from leaking.

“Okay, Thandi. I admit that my father is a damn racist. If you’ve heard everything, you probably know that I told him he’s a racist.”

“That I know, J. I also know that he’s been hiding the fact that the heart that’s been pumping blood in you comes from a dead black woman.”

“And the best thing you can do is leave me in this mess, at seven o’clock in the evening. And how are you going to get to Soweto at this time?” he asked.

“J, you know that I love you. But what I’m not prepared to do is to waste my precious life fighting old racists like your father. With due respect to him, the man could not even come to terms with the fact that a black woman gave his son a second chance to live. He had to hide it from you for so many years.”

She stood up to switch on the lights.

“Sorry, I was not aware that it was already dark inside,” he said, calmly.

She went on as if what he said did not matter.

“I can’t waste my life fighting that, J. My mother was shot with rubber bullets and teargas in high school. She was called a kaffir by arrogant white cops who thought black life meant

nothing. I have no time for such nonsense in the new South Africa, J. I'm going to Soweto tonight!"

Jaco stood up to switch the fan on.

"Thanks, it's getting too hot in here," she said.

"Thandi, please don't go. At least don't go tonight. You know me. I also thought I knew my father. I'm confused. I still don't know what to do. Please don't leave me in this mess."

She looked at him, at his eyes and how tears were beginning to swell.

She held him by the hand and pulled him closer to her. They both sat on the edge of the bed.

She lowered her voice.

"J, I love you and this whole thing hurts. I never thought I'd find myself in something like this. I'm scared. I'm angry. To be honest with you, I don't know how I'm feeling right now. All I know is that I love you."

Her hand had rested on his lap and her eyes focussed on his hands. She realised that he was shaking.

She kept quiet for a while. He said no word too.

"J, do you love me?" she asked.

"Thandi, I love you and you have seen that. The whole white community is against us but I still love you. I promise you now that I'm not going to stop."

Tears were now flowing without any care.

She tightened her grip on his hand.

"It shall be okay, J. Don't ask me how and when because I don't know."

He looked at her. She looked at him. Their eyes locked. They hugged.

"I'm blessed to have you, Thandi."

"But we are in trouble, J."

Jaco kept mum.

"J, don't keep quiet. I said we're in trouble. What if your father comes back in the middle of the night and throws me out in the street? Say something, man!"

"I'm trying to think, okay!"

"Then think fast because we don't have the time," she said.

"Then let's go," he said.

“Go where?” she asked.

“I don’t know. Soweto? Do you think your mom will tell a white boy to go away?”

Piet had been gone for two days. His phone had been switched off since the minute Jaco heard the Isuzu roar out of the yard that evening.

In these two days, Jaco’s emotions had also moved from shock to anger, to concern and eventually, to being worried about his father’s whereabouts.

It was not for the old man to just disappear without saying where he was going. He was not sure whether his father was eating wherever he was or whether he was simply living on Klipdrift and Coca Cola. Surely he also had no change of clothes.

“He must be stinking wherever he is,” Jaco imagined.

He had tried many times to call his father, all in vain.

“Hallo. This is Piet van Wyk. I am not available to take your call right now. Please leave a message. I will return your call. God bless.”

Jaco left a message every time.

The greetings would later be followed by a voice saying “This mailbox is full.”

Jaco had also called all family members and his father’s friends that he thought the old man could have gone to. No one knew where Piet was.

He then thought that by a slight chance his father might respond to a text message to his phone.

“Pa, I am no longer angry at you. I have not spoken to pa the way pa has brought me up. I sincerely apologise. I beg you to accept my apology and come back home. I have also decided to forgive you from hiding the truth from me. I understand that some things are not easy to talk about. Please come home, pa. Your son, Jaco.”

Hours went by without any response to the text message.

Eventually Jaco went to the police station to report his father missing but was told that there was an entry in the Occurrence Book that his father had been there two days earlier saying that he would be gone and had not told his family.

“He came to report that he was about to leave town for a while and that we should not be bothered to look for him in case he is reported missing. I’m very sorry, *meneer*. We cannot look for people who are not lost. If you have family issues, please sort them out yourselves,” said a visibly tired constable behind the counter.

“Pa will come back home when he is ready,” he thought as he left the cop shop.

He headed straight to Doctor Hennie Marais’ surgery to see if he could verify what his father had said about him carrying the heart of a black woman.

He knew that he had a transplanted heart, but had always been told that it had belonged to a young policeman who was killed during the anti-apartheid riots in Galeshewe Township. No one had ever hinted that it might have been the heart of a black woman. Not that he would have minded.

The old doctor had been treating the family for four decades since he came out of medical school in Bloemfontein. In that period he had overseen Jaco’s birth. He had also certified his mother’s death. In fact, the last time Jaco saw the bespectacled old man was shortly before his mother’s funeral.

“Good heavens! I can’t believe that I get to know something as important as this on the anniversary of my mother’s passing,” he said to himself as he was sitting in the waiting room that had also been the same for as long as he could remember.

Save for one poster behind the receptionist’s counter, the room was just as it was the day Jaco saw it for the first time in his life.

The ‘No Smoking’ sign had turned yellow. The other notice saying ‘Sorry, we don’t write sick notes’ had also been there for as long as Doctor Marais’ medical career.

Rose Thackeray had also been the doctor’s receptionist cum assistant since she left high school. Her boss was even paying her son’s fees at his alma mater, the University of the Orange Free State, where he was studying medicine.

She often told patients that one day when Doctor Marais was too old to treat his patients, her son would take over the surgery. She was clearly happy and proud that even though she was paid a pittance, her boss had given her the most precious of gifts – putting her only child through the university.

“You can go through, Jaco. The doctor is ready for you.”

Deep in his heart Jaco knew that what his father had said was true.

“Young man, you must understand that your father is bit old school. We, I mean mine and your father’s generation, come from an era that is starkly different from yours. Your family wanted you to live. You were five years old then and had a bleak future unless a heart donor was found,” Doctor Marais said.

The old doctor gave him a tissue paper to wipe tears from his face, but he didn’t use it. A *harde Boerseun* was not ashamed to let his tears be seen.

“Doctor, do you know who this donor was?” Jaco asked.

“I cannot remember her name. But she was from a village west of the city. We can look through the old newspapers. I am certain we will find her name and surname.”

Fortunately it was late in the evening and there were no patients waiting to see the doctor. Rose brought tea for the two men. Only Doctor Marais drank his.

“You can go home, Rose. I’ll see you tomorrow. We’ll be fine,” the old doctor said.

“Good night, doctor. Good night, Jaco.”

They both continued to look through the stacks of old newspapers.

The old doctor had the habit of keeping every edition of the Diamond Fields Advertiser in which anything that related to medicine was reported. He knew that an article about the first heart transplant in Kimberley was in one of the editions he kept.

“You see, a heart surgeon was flown to Kimberley from Bloemfontein. I was only there to support your family. I did not participate in the operation. But it was reported in the paper the day after it was performed. We will find the donor’s name,” Doctor Marais said.

“In fact we must find the paper by using your age. When were you born?”

“March the seventh, 1981.”

“You were five years old when the transplant was done. It must have been in 1986 after your fifth birthday.”

They put a pile of 1986 editions aside and looked through them.

After considerable searching as he saw a front page screaming -

“MEDICAL HISTORY: first heart transplant done in city.”

“Doctor, here it is,” he said as he handed over the old newspaper to the old doctor. Tears continued to flow from his eyes.

His picture was also in the paper. It was a picture with which he was very familiar.

A page in medical history was written yesterday in the Kimberley Hospital when five-year-old Jaco van Wyk became the beneficiary of the first heart transplant to be done in the city.

A well-known heart surgeon, Professor Kurt Morris, from Universitas Hospital in Bloemfontein, was flown to the city to lead a team that operated on Van Wyk.

Morris said that the heart, which was donated by a woman who died after being severely assaulted by her customary law husband in Dikhudung Village outside Kimberley two days ago, began pumping within five minutes after it was transplanted.

“I am very happy. God is indeed great. I and my wife have been praying every day for Jaco to get a heart donor. Now God has answered our prayers,” said Piet van Wyk, the recipient’s overjoyed father.

After a third attempt someone answered the phone.

“Johan, are you busy? I’d like you to do me a favour,” said Doctor Marais to his youngest.

“I’m just watching a rugby game. What does pa need me to do for him?”

“I have a patient here, son. He’s almost your age. He’s not too well and I don’t want him to drive home alone. Ask your mother to drop you here and then you can drive this young man to his home in his car. I’ll drive behind you. Please, son.”

“Pa, it’s the Griquas playing against the Cheetahs. It’s a hot game. Can’t he wait a little bit longer?”

“He can’t, son. He’s been here for a few hours already. He needs to go home. I must also go home and rest. Can’t you ask your sister to record the remaining part of the game for you?”

In no time Doctor Marais’ son had arrived at the surgery. He found his father and Jaco sitting on the sofa in the reception room. All other rooms were dark. A tea pot and two cups, one full and the other one empty, were still on the coffee table. A stack of old newspapers was on the floor.

Johan stood there like he was there and not there at the same time. The two men he found in the surgery paid no attention to him, save for the brief greetings they exchanged when he walked through the door.

Jaco was still crying, uncontrollably. The old doctor was squeezing his shoulder.

“Son, beyond the colour of our skin we are all the same. A heart pumps blood. It cares not what race you are,” Doctor Marais said to Jaco.

“Doctor, it’s not that it’s the heart of a black woman that’s pumping the blood that courses through my veins. It’s the deception that hurts.”

“I know, son.”

“I doubt you have you the slightest idea how I feel, doctor. All along I thought I was carrying the heart of a young man, a policeman who was killed in the line of duty. I spent years trying to understand the morality of sending men with guns to the township to shoot at people who just wanted to live as free as the children of God. Now it’s even worse. I don’t know whether this heart was donated or taken without consent. How am I to live with all these questions?”

Doctor Marais kept quiet. He asked Johan for another pot of tea.

“I won’t take tea, doctor. I won’t take anything. The only thing I want now is the truth. Who do I trust to tell me that truth? You? My father? The *dominee*? Who is going to tell me the truth? Even my mother went to the grave with that truth! The people who have raised me from the age of five have conveniently hidden the truth from me! Why?”

He threw his hands in the air.

Doctor Marais held his hands like a man in prayer, facing downwards.

“If I have I lived until I’m eighteen with the heart of a black woman in me, what’s so shameful about it? Why can’t someone tell me that some black woman whose body was buried somewhere has given me a chance to live? Now my father is gone. He can’t even face the truth. This is what I mean, Doctor. It’s like there is a war waged inside my body and the warring parties don’t give a damn!”

The doctor stood up to bring him a glass of water.

“Son, I have called Johan to take you home. You’re too emotional now and that’s understandable. I want us to talk tomorrow. I’ll give you a pill that will help you to sleep tonight. Let’s meet again tomorrow morning.”

Jaco took the glass of water from Johan and took the pill. He gave Johan his car keys.

“I guess you’ll be driving then,” he said.

“Yes. Pa will drive behind us. He’ll pick me up at your place after you’ve gone into the house.”

The old doctor locked the front door of the surgery and got into his white Mercedes Benz E Class and waited for the two young men to exit the parking area first. He followed them.

“Truth has funny ways of coming out,” the old doctor thought while waiting in his car for the two young men to drive out.

After one minute the Volkswagen Citi Golf pulled out of the visitors’ parking area.

PART THREE

Matiholaadibona was just about to leave when he saw a face he thought was slightly familiar at the back gate. With trepidation, he walked towards the visitor.

“Dumela rra,” he greeted him, extending a hand. *Good evening.*

The visitor extended a hand too.

“You must be Kedibone’s uncle.”

“Yes, *rra*. I am. But please forgive me; I think I remember your face but your name eludes me,” said Matlholaadibona.

“I don’t blame you, *rra*. I come from Taung even though I work at De Beers Mine here in Kimberley. I met you at the funeral of your uncle four years ago and again when you were there about two years ago. I think it was at around the end of the month.”

Matlholaadibona remembered the man.

“Your name is Motsumi. Am I right?”

The man smiled.

“Yes, you are right. My parents’ yard shares a fence with your aunt’s yard in Taung. Do you remember the white house?”

“The one with a mud house outside? Yes! Now I remember you. Please forgive me for being forgetful.”

Seeing other workers exiting the premises, Matlholaadibona realised that the dairy was about to close for the day.

“Rre Motsumi, will you be able to wait for me here, if you are not in a hurry? I won’t be gone for longer than a few minutes. You can sit on this bench.”

Matlholaadibona went into the building, took a quick shower and came out dressed in his ordinary clothes.

All workers at Koen Schoeman Dairy did the same. They would normally dress up in their smart clothes when they left home in the morning and then change into blue overalls and gumboots when they got to work. They would then take the dirty overalls home on Fridays to be washed and ready for the new week.

In a flash Matlholaadibona was back.

“I’m sorry to keep you waiting, *rra*. But how can I help you?” he asked the visitor.

“*Rra*, I have been asked by my father to look for you. Your aunt has no idea that I’m here.”

Matlholaadibona sensed something serious coming his way. The visitor continued.

“Since the death of your uncle four years ago, your aunt depends solely on the old age pension to survive. But now with the new baby at home, it seems she is hardly coping.”

“Rre Motsumi, o nthaya o reng,” said Matlholaadibona, with his right hand on the lips. *Sir, this is news to me.*

“At least that’s what my father thought. I normally go home at the end of the month and I can’t say that I really know how my neighbours are living. But on three occasions, my mother

bought baby's milk which she said was meant for the little boy next door. I don't mind helping but I'm really worried about the little boy."

Matlholaadibona was surprised because his aunt never complained about running out of groceries or struggling to make ends meet. He also knew that his mother occasionally sent money through the post office to her sister in Taung. He kept quiet for a while, stroking his chin with his eyes staring into the sky.

"Rre Motsumi, thank you very much for making me aware of this situation. I honestly thought the money my mother sends to my aunt was enough to help her with the baby."

"It's clearly not enough, *rra*."

The visitor stood up.

"I'm also happy I found you. The last time when we were together you mentioned that you are working at a dairy in town. I thought it might be this one because there are not many dairies in Kimberley."

"You're spot on, *rra*."

Matlholaadibona also stood up.

"Are you not going to Galeshewe? We can walk together to the taxi rank."

"*Nnyaa, rra*. I'm about to start working. I'm on night shift this week. But I also stay at the mine hostel."

The two men shook hands.

"I really appreciate your effort, Rre Motsumi. I'll do something about this," said Matlholaadibona.

"Tsamaya sentle, morwarre," the visitor said. *Go well, my brother*.

Matlholaadibona walked towards the Craven Street Taxi Rank. The half past six bus was always full and he was in no mood to stand in a long queue.

Since his mother and niece left him alone in Galeshewe to go and live in Dikhudung village, Matlholaadibona had become a lonely man. The house he lived in had also ceased to be a home. It was just a house, a shell into which he retreated every evening after a long day toiling at the dairy. He had moved into the main bedroom, the one in which his parents lived until death separated them. After the move to the village, his mother handed the house to him.

"Matlho, now you are no longer under my wings. You must know that from now on you are the head of this house. Please, do not let go of its dignity," she had said.

Indeed he was. He took good care of the house. He kept it clean inside and outside. The gates remained locked during the day while he was at work and at night when he was sleeping. The front door and windows were hardly seen open. Matlholaadibona tended to the lawn and the flower garden every Sunday late afternoon when he came back from the village. The house and the yard were always clean but there was hardly any sign of life.

He drank beer with his friends, but they would never go to his house to drink.

“My father and mother never tasted alcohol,” he often told his friends.

They respected his wishes and would never try to make him change his mind.

He checked on his mother’s friends; MmaBaard and MmaPico. He often asked them if they needed him to do anything for them. MmaPico often asked him to drop letters for her at the post office. MmaBaard once remarked that he had become a better man since he started living on his own.

That evening when he arrived at home after meeting Motsumi, he thought about his aunt in Taung and the burden she had of raising his niece’s little child. Coming to think of it, his aunt was not the kind of a person who would complain. She took in all the pain without uttering a word to the next person.

Matlholaadibona was not surprised that she had not said a word about struggling to raise the boy. She had always been there for the rest of the extended family. She attended most relatives’ funerals and contributed with the little money that she had. She was consulted every time when a cultural ceremony had to take place. Quite often younger relatives ran to her when their marriages ran into trouble, and she would never disappoint them.

He also thought of the little boy. He didn’t look like other village boys, except those who were born under the circumstances as sad as his and had been left in the village by their mothers who returned to the cities soon after birth.

He thought of the little boy’s blue eyes, his light brown soft and curly hair and the skin pale enough to attract attention.

Neighbours’ children called him “ngwana wa lekgowa,” a white child. Matlholaadibona wasn’t surprised by that. Other children in the village who looked like his grand nephew were referred to as such. He never thought that neighbours’ children intended any malice.

But he also started to imagine how his aunt really struggled to bring up the little boy. Of course she was no longer living alone. She had a child to sing and talk to, to teach how to greet neighbours and close his eyes when she said a prayer. At the same time more expenses incurred.

Matlholaadibona wondered when last his mother sent money to her sister in Taung to help her carry the burden of raising the boy.

“I really think *mma* could have given *mmangwane* something out of the thirty-five thousand rand the Portuguese man gave her,” he said to himself.

He struggled to sleep. He moved his hand towards the window curtain and pulled it. He looked outside. Galeshewe Township had gone to sleep. Only witches and insomniacs like him with things raging in their heads were still up at that time. The sky looked perfect with the bright moon and the stars adorning it. Not even a police or ambulance siren disturbed the peace and silence that reigned. He closed the curtains and slid back under the blankets. Thoughts of his grand nephew and the struggling aunt occupied his mind. He also thought of his mother and how she could have given her sister even one thousand rand.

He remembered the last time he was in Taung. He had bought his grand nephew some clothes from Pep Store. He also had brought some groceries for his aunt. He realised that apart from a bag of potatoes and maize meal, there was nothing before he arrived.

“You never come to my home with empty hands. You remind me of your father. Thank you, Matlho.”

His aunt never said his name in full. She was the first to call him Matlho, which literally meant eyes. The nickname stuck and many people never knew his full name, which had a different meaning altogether. Matlholaadibona meant the one who had seen many troubles in his life. At times he wondered why he was given such a name.

“Go to the cemetery and ask your father,” his mother would tell him every time he asked.

Matlholaadibona arrived at the main gate of the men’s hostels just before six o’clock in the morning.

It was still dark and slightly cold. Winter was creeping in.

He looked at the elderly woman who was sitting next to the brazier with two aluminium kettles and huge bowl of fat cakes.

He slowly walked towards her, dipped a hand in his pocket and took out a few coins.

“A nka bona magwenya a mabedi le kofi, *mma*?” he asked. *Can I get two fat cakes and a cup coffee, ma’am?*

“You are the first customer of the day. You must see how they push each other for these fat cakes when they get to the hostel after night shift. I’m only here until half past seven, and I go home without a single fat cake,” the old woman said enthusiastically, giving Matlholaadibona two fat cakes wrapped in a piece of a newspaper and coffee in a foam cup. She had not asked him whether he took it with milk and with how many spoons of sugar. She just added the ingredients.

He had just finished eating when he heard many voices singing in unison from the direction of the mine shaft. The old woman looked at him.

“Those are the ones who have been working throughout the night,” she said.

He wished she could just keep quiet.

He threw his eyes at the army of men in overalls and helmets with lamps steadily approaching. In no time they had encircled the woman, talking very loud, buying fat cakes and coffee for some breakfast before going into daytime slumber.

He couldn't believe people could laugh so loud after a whole night of labour. Perhaps they made noise to keep demons at bay.

Matlholaadibona moved away from the woman and her customers, closer to the gate.

He was still wildly looking around when he heard a voice.

“*Rra*, are you looking for me?”

It was Motsumi, the man who came to the dairy the previous evening to bring him the news that deprived him of sleep.

“*Dumela, rra*. I'm sorry to wait for you here at this time of the morning,” Matlholaadibona said.

He wanted to find out when Motsumi would go home to Taung.

“I'm going home this Friday when I knock off in the morning.”

“There are few things that I would like to send to *mmangwane* with you. That's if your hands would not be full.”

It was a common practice to send items, money and letters to relatives and family in the villages through other people who worked in the cities. The practice was based on trust, even if the messenger was only vaguely known to the sender. In cases where one owned a car, living animals and second-hand furniture could occasionally be sent with him.

“I won't mind, *rra*. You can wait for me here on Friday around this time.”

Matlholaadibona thanked him and wished him a good rest. He then started walking towards the dairy.

The main entrance of the hostel compound had become a very busy place. Matlholaadibona had always known that a lot of people worked at the diamond mines around Kimberley, but he had no idea that one shift could have thousands of men.

He looked at the hostels. They didn't look too pretty. It was rows and rows of brick structures. If anything, they were scary. He imagined how life was behind the high security fence and the concrete walls.

He had heard many stories about life in the single sex hostels; naked men pushing each other in queues for warm water showers, loud music, religious services, cultural ceremonies, sporting activities, hostel bosses and night watchmen who took bribes to let wives and prostitutes in at night.

He thought of the scores of men he saw earlier. They appeared to be hardworking fathers and husbands. They sang songs of hope as they emerged from the mine gates to lighten their spirits and to keep going. None of them died rich, unless they had stolen diamonds, found a good buyer and were never caught. Even then, they would have to sell it through an unscrupulous dealer who would make a killing through the transaction, taking advantage of the illegality of the whole process.

He pulled the sleeve of his jacket slightly to have a look at the time. It was already quarter to seven. He picked up the pace. He had to be in by seven o'clock.

Friday morning in Galeshewe had a different colour to it. For starters, it was known that every second Friday there was a group of workers who got paid. Civil servants got paid on the fifteenth, mineworkers on the last day of the month and scores of workers got paid every fortnight. Those who knew they were going to receive their envelopes that Friday usually dressed up well on their way to work as some might not go home after knocking off and others would only work until lunch-time before embarking on long distance trips.

Conversations in buses and taxis to town were also very lively. There was always a joke to share and people looked for every opportunity to laugh and be merry. No one said a thing about the police raids or the neighbour's boy who had been stabbed to death at a shebeen.

Knowing that he had to go home to Dikhudung village after work, Matlholaadibona also dressed up well in his Brentwood trousers, Pringle shirt and two-tone Crocket & Jones shoes. He wore his favourite Daks of London cap.

Unlike other Fridays when he would leave home with a bag full of dirty clothes that were destined for washing on Saturday, he left with an extra package in his hands. He had a plastic bag full of clothes that he was going to ask Motsumi to take to Taung.

When he got to the main gate of the mine hostels, Motsumi was already waiting for him.

"Dumela, morwarre," he greeted him. *Good morning, son of my father.*

"Dumela, rra."

It was only when he saw the elderly woman who sells fat cakes and coffee packing up that he realised he was actually late. He gave Motsumi the plastic bag with clothes.

"Please give this to *mmangwane*. It's clothes for that boy."

He put a hand in his pocket and came out with a small envelope.

“I also have a parcel that I would also like you to take with. Please tell *mmangwane* that I’ll come to see her the weekend after next. And remember to greet that little boy for me,” said Matlholaadibona, wishing Motsumi a safe journey to Taung.

He also knew that he did not have much time on his hands. It was already after seven and his boss must have been waiting for him. He always got irritated when he thought about his boss.

The man showed no respect for his employees. He had recently fired one of them just for stealing a brick of cheese. Seeing that he had nothing to lose, the man decided to beat up his boss. All other employees ran away instead of stopping the hail of fists that fell on their boss. None of them made a witness’ statement to the police. They were all in good spirits for almost the whole month after the incident.

Matlholaadibona felt lucky when he was told that his boss sent a message saying he was sick and would only see them at eleven o’clock with their wages.

“That means we might even go home early after delivering to the shops and hotels,” he thought.

It was already dark when the taxi dropped Matlholaadibona off at the bus stop on the main road to Campbell. There were other passengers disembarking on the same stop, also going into the village. He could hear music from the distance.

It must be at Downhill, he thought.

A set of headlights emerged from the other end of the village. As they approached he realised that it was a *mellow yellow*. It was in a hurry.

“They got them. Maybe this village will be safe now,” another man who was walking close behind him, said.

Many villagers had been complaining about some young men robbing people who got out of taxis at night at the end of the month and fortnight. MmaMosadiwatlala had also warned Matlholaadibona about them.

“Ke bana ba kwa lekeisheneng ba ba tlang ka makgakga mo motseng wa rona,” she often said. *It’s the boys from township who are doing these dirty things in our village.*

Matlholaadibona concurred with the man who was now walking beside him.

“It’s good that they have arrested them. We can’t work and have these lazy scoundrels taking our money.”

They steadily approached Downhill.

“I need to get two quarts for the morning. Are you also going in?” the man asked.

“*Nnyaa, rra*. I need to get home quickly,” he replied.

The truth was that since his niece’s death, Matlholaadibona was no longer fond of going to Downhill. He often bought his beer in town before taking a taxi to the village. Once in a while he would go there. But he would not sit and drink. Instead he would buy two quarts of Carling Black Label and go home to drink it while watching a game of soccer on television.

As his companion went in to join others inside the shebeen, Matlholaadibona carried on with his journey. Home was no longer that far.

He could see from the gate through the window that the television was still on. In her mid sixties, MmaMosadiwatlala still stayed up until late and woke up earlier than her son and many other people in the village.

He knocked on the door.

“Tsena,” she answered. *Come on in*.

She had been expecting him to arrive at anytime.

“*Ao, mma*. You are still up at this time?”

“*Ee, ngwanaka*. What can I do? It’s not pleasant to live alone at my age. I need to get new glasses. Maybe I’ll start reading again. For now I watch this box,” she said, pointing at the television.

“But the news about children getting arrested and dying in police cells is depressing.”

Matlholaadibona placed a bag of groceries on the table. He took out Pace and Bona magazines and gave them to his mother. His mother had been buying the two magazines for as long he could remember. After she had moved to the village, it became his duty to buy the magazines every month for her.

“Even these magazines, I don’t read everything in them like I used to. My eyes are really bad, my child.”

It wasn’t only her eyes. The old woman’s health had taken a beating since the death of her granddaughter. She had become withdrawn. She gradually became thin and frail. She depended on chronic medication, which Matlholaadibona had to collect once a month at the Kimberley Hospital.

During Godknows’ trial, she only went to court once and fainted when the prosecutor cross examined him. She couldn’t bear listening to the details of how Kedibone was killed. After that she stayed at home until the *kgosi* came to tell her that he had been sentenced to ten years’ imprisonment.

“Thank you, *kgosi*. What can I say? He is going to prison and will come out but my granddaughter is dead and buried. I’ll never see her again,” she told the *kgosi* that day.

She looked at her son.

“*Ngwanaka*, you are old enough to get me a daughter-in-law,” she said.

Matlholaadibona burst out laughing.

“Why are you laughing?”

“I didn’t expect *mma* to say that.”

“You can see that I’m getting old, my child. Very soon I’ll be unable to do anything for myself. It’s a shame that I have a son who is not married at the age of forty.”

Matlholaadibona laughed again. He stood up without a word and started packing the groceries in the cupboard and milk and meat in the fridge.

“*Mma*, I’ll go to the hospital on Monday and see if I can’t get you an appointment with the optometrist.”

“Thank you, my child. But remember what I just said about getting a wife. We have enough cattle in the kraal,” *MmaMosadiwatlala* said.

He went to bed but spent many hours staring at the zinc roof. He hadn’t spoken to his mother about a visit by *Motsumi* and her struggling aunt in *Taung*.

Matlholaadibona was woken by the mooing cattle and the barking dog. He opened the curtains and saw the herder entering the kraal.

The cattle the family received from *Godknows’* family for *bogadi* when *Kedibone* was married had multiplied. On two occasions, Matlholaadibona and his mother sold ten cattle at the auction in *Campbell*.

“If we don’t sell them, they’ll be too many and people will start stealing them. I also don’t want *Molefi* to look after too many cattle. He is too old already,” his mother said.

But the old woman preferred *Molefi* to look after her cattle. Almost everyone in the village who had a young herder complained about calves disappearing after birth. It seems *Molefi* was content with the little wage he received every month, the milk he took home and one calf he was given every year.

Matlholaadibona also had a soft spot for him. He often enquired about his health and brought him medicines from town. He even bought him a rain coat and a warm military type coat to ward off the winter cold.

The sun had not yet risen. He could hear the sound of the wind outside and felt sorry for the old man.

His thoughts were still wandering in faraway places when he heard the kettle in the kitchen.

“Goodness! This old woman never sleeps,” he thought.

His mother always woke up when Molefi came in, to make tea and jam sandwiches for him.

There was no way he could remain in bed while his mother was up and about. He also had to greet Molefi and give him his monthly wage.

After he got out of his bedroom and greeted his mother, his mind drifted from Dikhudung village to his aunt’s four-roomed house in Taung. Looking at his mother who was busy in the kitchen, he couldn’t help but notice how she and her sister could be mistaken for twins had one of them not been born earlier.

“*Mma*, there is a man who came to see me at work two days ago. He is the son of the old woman who lives in the white house next to *mmangwane*’s house in Taung.”
Matlholaadibona said to his mother, who has been humming one hymn since she woke up.

She stopped humming and turned around to look at her son.

“Did he come all the way from Taung to see you?”

“*Nnyaa, mma*. He lives at the mine hostel. He came to tell me about *mmangwane* and how she is struggling with Modisa.”

He told his mother how bad he felt that a neighbour had to take the initiative of finding him to let him know of his aunt’s woes.

“Yesterday morning I gave him some money to give to *mmangwane* and some clothes for Modisa.”

MmaMosadiwatlala had been quiet all along, listening to her son.

“*Ngwanaka*, what are we going to do now? I’m too old now to look after a two-year-old. Who will wash his clothes and look after him when he is sick? Now you see the importance of getting me a daughter-in-law? She could look after me and Modisa.”

Matlholaadibona was walking past Da Silva’s Food Corner when an idea came to him. He decided to go in.

“Is Mister Da Silva in?” he asked the waitress.

“The older one is here. Emmanuel is not in today,” said the thin girl with light complexion.

“I’m actually looking for Diego. You can tell him I need to see him urgently.”

Diego’s eyes widened when he saw Matlholaadibona.

“Do I know you from somewhere?” he asked.

“Yes, Mister Da Silva. I’m Kedibone’s uncle. Do you remember her?”

He extended a hand to greet him.

“Oh, *ja*. Now I remember her. I read in the papers that she was killed by her husband.”

“Yes. Unfortunately she is gone. Did you know that she had a son?” Matlholaadibona asked.

He shook his head.

“Is the father the one who killed her?”

“No. Shortly after what happened here we found out that she was pregnant. She gave birth to your grandson, Mister Da Silva.”

Diego stared at him, saying nothing.

“Mister Da Silva, you heard what I just said?”

He shook his head and blinked repeatedly like someone emerging from slumber.

“Yes. You are saying that Kedibone gave birth to Emmanuel’s child? How do you know that it’s his child?”

“The child is Coloured, Mister Da Silva. He has soft brown curly hair and blue eyes. Everybody can see that the boy has a white father. There are many kids like that. We’re grown up, Mister Da Silva. We can see these things,” Matlholaadibona said.

Diego switched off the radio and wiped sweat from his face with a hand.

“I had no idea. I’m just shocked at the news. I doubt Emmanuel knows too. Not that it would make any difference if he knew.”

He asked the waitress who was passing near his office for two cups of coffee.

“I hope you’ll have time for coffee.”

Matlholaadibona nodded.

“Is it possible for me to see the boy?” he asked Matlholaadibona.

“To prove that he is your grandson, Mister Da Silva?”

“No. Not at all. I believe you. He is my grandchild.”

They were passing the hospital when Diego told Matlholaadibona that he used to come to Taung when he was still a little boy.

“My father’s friend used to be a Catholic priest here. At that time he was the only white person living here. But he could speak Setswana like it was his mother tongue.”

The place looked very dry. Grass had lost its colour. They passed a cow that was chewing plastic.

“Look at the bones protruding on that cow. It has no meat at all. Even if you try to sell at the auction, no one will bother,” Diego said.

Almost all cows they drove past looked like that one. They were emaciated; bones were covered by a thin layer. Matlholaadibona wondered what they were eating. Nobody seemed to be prodding them. They just went by, seemingly searching for anything that could fill the stomach.

They left the tarred road into a dirt road entering the village.

“This part of Taung is called Chief’s Court. The royal house is not too far from here,” Matlholaadibona said.

Diego wondered whether the palace was also a mud house like the many houses they slowly drove past. The dirt road was narrow and also full of ditches and stones. A group of young children were playing on the side of the road.

“Aren’t they too young to be playing without an adult watching them?” he asked.

“Most of these children are living with their grandparents. They can’t run after them all the time.”

Matlholaadibona told him that middle-aged people were few in the village. Most inhabitants were either in their twilight years or too young to be working. By the time they are able to work, they move to the towns and cities. They return once they are of no use to the employers.

Modisa was sitting on the *stoep* when the car stopped outside the house. He was holding a plastic toy, saying grown-up things that people could not understand.

“There is your grandson,” Matlholaadibona said to Diego just before they got out of the car.

“Definitely this is not a black or a coloured child,” Diego said.

Matlholaadibona looked at him and nodded.

“I told you.”

“I never doubted you,” he said to Matlholaadibona.

The old woman emerged from the house just as they were closing the doors of the car.

“Dumela, mmangwane,” Matlholaadibona greeted her, hugging her. *Good afternoon, aunty.*

“Dumela, mma,” Diego said. *Good afternoon, ma’am.*

The old woman extended a hand. She looked surprised that a white man spoke Setswana.

She invited them inside and brewed tea.

Matlholaadibona told her that Diego Da Silva was Modisa's grandfather.

"He didn't know about the boy, *mmangwane*. He asked me to bring him here immediately after I told him about Modisa."

"Erole ke mmona, ka belaela," she said. *That's what I suspected when I saw him.*

She called the boy, who was still outside, seemingly oblivious to the affairs of old people.

Matlholaadibona quickly stood up and went to pick up the boy.

Diego looked at Matlholaadibona and the boy.

"Will you translate for your aunty? My Setswana can't go beyond the greetings."

The old woman laughed.

"Mister Da Silva I can speak English. Don't worry. Maybe my English is even better than this boy's," she said, pointing at Matlholaadibona.

The old woman went to school until Form I. She was trusted by her neighbours to read letters for them. Just like he did for his mother, Matlholaadibona knew that he always had to bring her a magazine whenever he visited her.

"I'm very sorry, *mma*. Please forgive me for assuming."

"It's okay. I also was surprised when you greeted me in my language."

Diego told her that he was very sorry for what his son did to Kedibone.

"But children, whichever way they come, are a gift from above. I really had no idea that she gave birth to a child. Believe me, I would have assisted in any way possible," he said.

The old woman nodded in agreement. Matlholaadibona chipped in.

"Sorry Mister Da Silva, to enter your conversation. *Mmangwane* lives alone with this little boy. She is a pensioner and I doubt she manages to get this boy what he needs with that little money."

His aunt cleared her throat.

Realising that he might have jumped the gun, he quickly apologised to his aunt.

"I'm sorry, *mmangwane*. But I thought that I must mention that upfront because if it's not said, there is no way Mister Da Silva would know the real situation here."

Diego raised his right hand.

"It's okay. I'm an adult. I can see with my own eyes that it must be hard for your aunty."

The old woman called Matlholaadibona to the bedroom.

Diego looked at the boy.

What a peaceful child, he thought.

He continued drinking his tea, which was already cold.

Matlholaadibona and his aunt emerged from the bedroom after a few minutes.

“Mister Da Silva, as my mother’s only son, I’m also my aunt’s son. Now, as the only male in the household at the moment, my aunt has asked me to continue discussing this matter with you.”

“That’s fine. I understand. But I need to get something in the car before we leave.”

He went out and came back holding an envelope.

“It might not be enough, *mma*. But I hope it will help you to some extent with the things you need.”

She smiled as she took the envelope.

“Thank you, Mister Da Silva. This will go a long way.”

Back in Hadison Park, Larry Pickover paged through the Diamond Fields Advertiser with little enthusiasm, spending just a few minutes on each page.

“I wonder why the Monday paper is always thin. Maybe it’s just sheer laziness,” he thought.

Then he got to page six.

Restaurant staff furious over Coloured boy, the headline read.

Waitresses at a busy city restaurant are furious after the owner has apparently forced them to do child-minding and not pay them for it.

Waitresses, who spoke to the newspaper on conditions of anonymity, have said that the restaurant owner recently adopted a two-year-old Coloured boy and has been instructing them to look after him.

“We are forced to look after this child yet we are not paid for extra work even though we have been employed as waitresses,” said one of the waitresses yesterday.

Apparently the restaurant owner chooses one waitress everyday to look after the boy. She would then only be able to go home late at night after the boy had fallen asleep. .

“This is very unfair. We all live in Galeshewe Township. Nine o’clock is too late to do anything when one arrives at home. I can’t even help my child with his school work and iron his school uniform,” another waitress fumed.

The restaurant owner has, however, denied forcing his staff to look after the boy.

“It is true that I occasionally ask my staff to help me look after the boy. This is just a temporary arrangement because the boy is only here for few weeks. But it’s not true that I’m forcing them to look after him. I simply ask for a favour.”

He also acknowledged that he is not paying them for extra work.

“I can’t pay them for extra work because whoever looks after the boy does not report for duty at the restaurant. It’s an alternative duty. If I have to pay them, I also have to deduct a day’s wage.”

The restaurant owner has emphasised that he has a good working relationship with his staff.

“I’m quite surprised that they have decided to run to the newspaper instead of talking to me about their concerns. They know that my door is always open,” he added.

He also denied having adopted the child.

Pickover shook his head.

Why would a white man in his late fifties adopt a two-year-old Coloured boy? Couldn’t he give his parents money for food and buy him toys, if he liked him that much?

He put the paper on the headboard and reached for his cold tea. He drank it anyway. He opened the drawer and took out his writing pad.

Dear Editor

I am writing this letter with the hope that it gets published in the Letters to the Editor page.

I have noticed, with concern, a developing habit by your journalists to quote people who wish to remain anonymous. This is a worrying matter because readers never know if these sources really exist. We have to trust the newspaper and that would not be such a problem because your newspaper has, over the years, proven to be reliable. However, this trend is likely to impact negatively on your paper’s credibility, especially when these unnamed sources are used quite frequently.

He took out his trusted Oxford Dictionary to see whether he could use the word ‘propensity’.

Yes! He could use the word instead of ‘tendency’ or ‘inclination’. He carried on.

What you need to seriously do is take into consideration is that your propensity to quote people who are not prepared to stick their necks out tests our trust in your journalists. I doubt you will deem it an ideal situation to have your readers not trusting your version of events.

I write this letter to you in an attempt to discourage you from further relying on these sources. Personally, I have read your paper since I was in school. I am now a retired teacher and I still look forward to the paper every morning. I doubt you would like to lose such a loyal reader.

Larry Pickover

Hadison Park

Kimberley.

He read the letter again before putting it in an envelope.

A neighbour's child brought a letter to MmaMosadiwatlala. She recognised her sister's handwriting on the blue envelope. She looked at the words on top of the postal stamp. They were not too clear. But she could figure out that the letter was posted in Taung about three weeks ago.

"With the school mailbag, one day our letters will reach our homes long after we have died," she thought.

She was always happy to receive a letter from her only sibling. She smiled as she read the opening line.

"Even though I cannot say I will still be alive when you read this letter, I have faith that God will keep me until then."

Some things never change, she thought.

She remembered how her sister was congratulated by their teacher, the Reverend William Jones, when she was still in Standard IV for writing the best letter in the school. She has never changed the opening line in all her letters since then.

But the contents of the letter took her by surprise.

"Modisa's grandfather came here and asked to take him to live with his family during these winter months. Maybe our little boy will be speaking English when they bring him back. Mister Da Silva seems like a good man. I was quite apprehensive when Matlho came with him here for the first time."

Matlholaadibona had not told her that he had met with Emmanuel's father, let alone taken him to Taung and now the little boy was living with a white family!

"Ka re a ntsetse, ngwana yo o ntsaya jang," she uttered the words loud, even though she was the only person in the house. *What does this child son take me for?*

Replying to her sister, she went on as if she was aware of everything.

“Yes, he is a good man. He was quite hurt after what his son had done to Kedibone.”

She continued writing the letter, telling her sister about a lonely life in the village and how Matlholaadibona had become more caring since Kedibone’s death.

“He does not go to that shebeen again. He buys his beer and drinks it here at home. I’m only worried because I’m getting too old and he is not saying anything about bringing me a daughter-in-law.”

She started imagining a life with a daughter-in-law around. A grandchild too. Maybe a little boy.

“Ah, this daydreaming,” she thought aloud and laughed as if she had an audience.

After writing the letter she took her walking stick and went to the shop to buy a stamp and an envelope.

“When is your boss dropping the mail at the post office,” she asked the young woman at the counter.

“He is going to town tomorrow morning,” she said before asking her why she didn’t send her neighbours’ children to the shop.

“I can’t stay in the house all the time, my girl. I also need to stretch my muscles and not give diseases a chance to relax in my body.”

It was almost nine o’clock when Matlholaadibona arrived at home. The light was still on in his mother’s bedroom. The winter cold had sent her packing from the *voorkamer* where she had been watching television.

Matlholaadibona held the doorknob, shook it sideways and realised it was not locked. He opened the door and went in.

“Mma, a o sa ntse o dutse,” he asked in a high-pitched voice. *Are you still up at this time?*

His mother was still reading a magazine.

“I’m going to sleep. I’ll see you tomorrow,” he said.

He had just put things in the fridge when the old woman emerged from her bedroom in a gown.

“Please switch on the kettle,” she said.

When that happened he knew she had something serious to talk about. And he had no option but do as she said.

“*Mma*, isn’t it late to drink tea?”

“No. It’s not. I’ve been waiting for you.”

Matlholaadibona sensed more trouble coming his way. What have I done now, he wondered.

“*Ngwanaka*, it’s true that as the only boy child you are the head of this household. But I’m your mother and for you to go behind my back doing things breaks my heart.”

“*Mma*, I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

The old woman handed him a letter from his aunt.

“Did you think I would never find out?”

His hand was shaking as he read the letter. He had meant to tell his mother. But every time when he planned to talk about Modisa, something happened. He did not think she would find out unless he told her.

“*Mma*, intshwarele,” he said without looking her straight in the eye. *Please forgive me.*

She kept quiet. Though he was not looking at her, he could feel her eyes piercing through to him.

“I was hurt and ashamed when Motsumi came to tell me that *mmangwane* was struggling with Modisa. It just happened that I was walking past the restaurant when I found myself going in to talk to Mister Da Silva about the situation.”

“Matlholaadibona, your aunt’s letter was posted three weeks ago. You can’t tell me that you had no time to talk to me about something as important as this every time you came home!”

When he saw his mother’s eyes swelling with tears, he realised that he had struck a snake at its tail.

“Have you sold my child’s son?”

“*Mma*?”

“Now you can’t hear? I’m asking you if you have sold the child to the Portuguese man. Did that Portuguese man give you the money?”

“*Nnyaa, mma*. How can I do such a thing? All he asked for was that Modisa pays his family a visit this winter!”

“Don’t raise your voice when you are talking to me, Matlholaadibona. Don’t you dare!”

He apologised.

The old woman stood up and went to the bedroom. He saw her switching the light off. He went to the fridge, pulled out a bottle of beer. He looked at it for a while and put it back in the fridge. He went to his bedroom.

Matlholaadibona had just arrived at the house in Galeshewe after work when MmaBaard came to knock on the door.

A white man driving a red car had been there.

“I think he must be in his fifties,” she said.

After she had described the red car, he figured out that it could only be Diego da Silva in his old Ford Cortina.

“How is your mother?” she asked.

“She is fine but seems lonely in the village. She is always at home. She only gets out when she leaves to go to church,” he said.

MmaBaard said the women at the church missed MmaMosadiwatlala. Her departure left a void. She had been an active member of the women’s movement for many years. Everyone knew that the only time she didn’t attend the women’s prayer service on Thursdays or the Sunday service was when she was very sick.

On several occasions she declined when elected to leadership positions. But she led by example, always from the background. She went with others to pray for the prisoners and the sick, all the time in her red and white Methodist Church uniform.

Matlholaadibona and Kedibone were used to having strangers coming to their home to thank to MmaMosadiwatlala for the prayers and the advice she gave them while they were in prison or hospital.

“Please give her my regards when you go home this weekend. Tell her that I’ll come and visit her when my daughter is here. At least there will be someone to look after my house,” MmaBaard said.

“She will be very happy, *mma*.”

Matlholaadibona was wondering why Diego would want to see him.

The following morning he left home much earlier than he usually did. He wanted to pass by Diego’s restaurant.

It was around half past six when he arrived at Da Silva’s Food Corner, which at that time only operated as a café. Diego was behind the counter.

“Good morning, Sir. Thank God you came,” Diego said to Matlholaadibona before he could even greet.

“I got the message that you came to see me,” said Matlholaadibona, extending a hand to properly greet him.

Diego apologised for talking to him from behind the counter.

“My people are only coming in at seven o’clock,” he said.

Matlholaadibona understood, but said he too had to be at work in few minutes’ time.

“I just wanted to make sure it was you who came because my neighbour could not remember the name. She just described you and the car. Is there something urgent that you wanted to see me about?”

“Not really urgent but it’s important that we sit and talk. It’s about the boy.”

“Do you want us to take him back to Taung?” Matlholaadibona asked.

“No. He likes it here. He seems very happy. You can come and see him. He is even able to say some words in English!”

They both laughed.

Matlholaadibona pressed his nose and said a few words in English, making the situation lighter.

They both burst out laughing.

Diego said they had to talk about Modisa’s future.

“I don’t think it’s a good idea for him to go back to the village. He can live permanently with us. I mean he is my grandson and he belongs here.”

Matlholaadibona had not expected that.

“Mister Da Silva, I don’t have an answer for you at the moment. Let me go to work and think about this. We can meet and talk later.”

They greeted each other and agreed to meet later.

Matlholaadibona had just turned to leave when Diego quickly asked him to wait a little.

“Just a minute,” he said and dashed to the back, leaving him alone in front of the counter.

He looked around the restaurant. The eating area was spotless. The fridges and shelves were filled with meat and drinks. The newspaper and magazine shelves had the latest issues. Everything looked clean. The ceiling fans were running. He looked at the “No Smoking” notice next to a cigarette poster. It looked yellow and had faded a little.

Diego returned after a minute.

“Thanks for keeping watch. It’s usually not very busy at this time.”

Three women aged around the age of thirty or so, walked in.

“Morning master,” they said, almost in unison.

One of the women took out a pinafore and a matching *doek* from her bag. The other one went to sit behind the counter. The third one started packing bread on the shelves.

Her straightened hair, thin eyes, fair complexion and slim figure reminded Matlholaadibona of his late niece.

“Maybe she’d still be working for this family had Emmanuel not raped her and Godknows had not killed her,” he thought. Lightning striking one woman twice.

He looked at his wristwatch.

“Are you late?” Diego asked.

“Slightly. I’m supposed to be in at seven.”

Diego offered to take him to work in his car.

When they stopped at the robots, a middle-aged black woman holding a white child crossed the road. They’re probably going to crèche. Matlholaadibona’s eyes remained fixed on them until they got to the other side.

“I think if Modisa comes to live here, we’ll take him to the same crèche. But I’ll take him there myself. He’s my only grandchild,” Diego said.

MmaMosadiwatlala was surprised to see Matlholaadibona arrive at home in the middle of the week.

“Don’t tell me they’ve fired you.”

“Nnyaa, mma. Se tshwenyeye,” he said with a smile. *Don’t worry.*

Diego had spoken to Matlholaadibona’s employer to give him two days off to attend to family matters.

He gave her the magazine and put a plastic bag on the table.

He came home to tell his mother that Diego wanted to adopt the boy.

“*Ngwanaka*, even though I was angry that you went with Da Silva to see the child without telling me, I’m actually happy that the Portuguese family now know that he exists and can help us to take care of him. As for him going to live permanently with them, I’m not too sure,” MmaMosadiwatlala said.

Matlholaadibona was convinced that it would do Modisa good if he were to be adopted.

“*Mma*, the reality is that both you and *mmangwane* are not young anymore. Taking care of Modisa cannot be easy. If he lives with his father’s family, there will always be someone to take care of him.”

His mother nodded. He was right.

Of course the little boy would have a better future than if he were to remain in the village.

“Will they allow us to see him?” she asked.

“Yes, *mma*. They can’t keep him away from us.”

This was quite rare, the old woman thought. Many times white families don’t want anything to do with children like Modisa. Da Silva must be a good man.

“*Ngwanaka*, you also know very well that these people have not married the child’s mother. Unless proper ways are followed, they have no rights over this child. Culture is culture, my son. Things must be done in the right way,” she said.

Matlholaadibona knew that very well. An ancestral ceremony had to take place first and the two families must visit Kedibone’s grave to seek her permission. And then an amount of money had to be paid to the Mosadiwatlala family as *bogadi* to allow the child to go to live with his father’s family.

Diego was not happy with the *bogadi* part. But Matlholaadibona would not budge.

“Unfortunately that’s the only way Mister Da Silva. The family of the father has absolutely no rights over the child unless that amount is paid out. It’s our culture.”

“And what about the money I gave to your mother? Can’t this *bogadi* come out of that?”

“Mister Da Silva nobody knew at that time that Kedibone was pregnant. Only you know why you gave my mother that money. If anything, that money has to be treated as a fee for the damages. It had nothing to do with *bogadi*.”

Diego adored the boy and was prepared to do anything to keep him. But it also irritated him that this family seemed to want to milk him as much as they could.

“Damages? Is that what you have just said?”

“Mister Da Silva it’s not the first time that a child is born out of wedlock in our community. What normally happens is that the father’s family pays *madi a tshenyo*, which you would call damages. That gives the father’s family some rights over the child but not custody. Let’s agree that the money you have given my mother is the damages. That allows you to name the child and see him whenever it’s possible, but not custody. That you can only get if *bogadi* is paid,” Matlholaadibona explained.

There seemed to be no way out except paying *bogadi* over to the Mosadiwatlala family. But still he was not too happy with the whole affair.

MmaMosadiwatlala and Matlholaadibona arrived while it was still early at the graveyard. The sun still had an hour before it showed up.

Kedibone's grave was at the far end of the graveyard. MmaMosadiwatlala lamented the overgrown grass between the graves and even on top of others.

"Matlho, I think later in the day you must come and clean around your niece's grave."

She asked him if he remembered where his grandfather and great-grandfather's graves were.

"Ao, *mma*. How can I forget where my ancestors' remains are?"

He pointed to the north of the graveyard.

They each picked up two small stones.

They arrived at Kedibone's grave and threw the stones on top, one by one.

Matlholaadibona looked at his mother with expectation. Though he was, in terms of culture, the head of the household, he still thought his mother had to take the lead.

"My grandchild, we are here to seek your permission. Your son's other family would like him to stay with them. We think it's a good idea because he will have a better future. You are also aware that the conditions under which he is living are not very good. Please, Kedi, grant us the permission to let them have him. Please my grandchild," the old woman said.

She sprinkled snuff on the grave. She carried on.

"I have come here with your uncle, who has witnessed our suffering and your son's suffering. He also thinks it's a good idea for your son to live with his father's family."

She sprinkled more snuff.

Matlholaadibona moved closer to the eastern end of the grave, where the head lay.

"Kedi, this is Matlholaadibona, your uncle. My niece, I also ask you to release the knot in your heart and forgive the father of your son for his sake. Please forgive him. We all know what an evil thing he did to you. We know the pain you endured. But my niece, please forgive him and let your son not be followed by bad luck in his life."

He also sprinkled some snuff on the grave.

He looked at his mother.

"*Mma*, I think she has heard us. All we can do now is to believe that she has acceded to our requests."

The old woman reminded him to come later in the afternoon to clean around the graves.

“Kedi, we are going, *ngwanaka*. Your uncle will come back this afternoon to clean around your house. Please remember us at all times. Plead with our other ancestors to look after us at all times,” MmaMosadiwatlala said.

They moved towards her father and grandfather’s graves. They negotiated their way among other graves, old and new. The old woman would stop and read on tombstones. She would then tell her son that she knew the deceased.

“Many of my friends died while they were still young.”

She would then relate how they grew up in the village and how they met their first boyfriends, most of whom became their husbands.

“Times have really changed, my son. At that time we knew that once you marry a person, only God would separate you when He called one of you. These days people divorce and marry again. That’s why there is so much bad luck on earth.”

Matlholaadibona was hoping that his mother would not bother him again about getting married.

They arrived at the two graves. They stood in the middle. On the right was his great-grandfather, the man he was named after. He was of the second generation to live in Dikhudung village. He had married two women after the elders told him that his cousin was reaching thirty without a man or a child.

“When you marry your cousin, the cattle return to where they are coming from,” they told the first Matlholaadibona.

He then took his cousin to become his second wife and the family escaped the embarrassment of one of their daughters becoming a *lefetwa*.

When MmaMosadiwatlala begot a boy child, she begged her husband that he be named after her grandfather. Nobody had been named after him and he would soon be forgotten unless someone carried his name. The boy was named Matlholaadibona Michael Mosadiwatlala.

On the left was the grave of his grandfather, Diteko. Matlholaadibona remembered him well because he used to come to Galeshewe when he was still very young. He remembered particularly that the old man would bring him sweets every time he paid them a visit.

MmaMosadiwatlala started talking to the family patriarch on the right.

“*Autata*, we are here to seek your blessings. We are about to make a very important decision. We are about to allow Kedibone’s son to live with the family of his father. *Autata*, you know very well the circumstances under which the boy was conceived. But we cannot live with a knot in our heart forever. The Portuguese family has expressed regret and shame at what happened. Now they want the boy to live with them so that he can have a better future. We believe it’s a good thing. We are here to seek your blessings, *autata*.”

She turned around and made the same plea to her father.

The sun was bright and it was warmer than in the previous two days. Larry Pickover folded the paper and walked out of his house. He stood at the gate and returned to the house. Magdalena could figure out that something was occupying Pickover's mind.

"Master, is there anything wrong?"

Pickover showed her the paper.

"Look at this, Maggie. Aren't they beautiful?"

Magdalena looked at the picture of a plump white man with a little Coloured boy on the street.

"This is nice, master."

"Yes, Maggie. This is beautiful and I can't understand why some people cannot see that beauty. The paper says some white parents have withdrawn their children from the crèche since this man brought this handsome little boy there."

Magdalena dropped her jaws in pretence that she was surprised.

Pickover lifted the paper.

"Here, Maggie. It says the man is a well-known restaurateur who has been donating food to a shelter for abused women for the past few months. He has now adopted a Coloured boy and now instead of being applauded for this, some devils are threatening him, writing racist messages on his car with spray paint!"

Magdalena shrugged her shoulders and proceeded towards the kitchen. Pickover walked to his study, pulled out a pad and started writing.

Dear Editor

Sir, I am dismayed at the conduct of some of our fellow residents. I read the story published in yesterday's Diamond Fields Advertiser about a city businessman who has apparently been subjected to abuse for a mere act of love and kindness.

According to your paper, the man has been donating food on a weekly basis to a shelter for abused women. He has now adopted a Coloured boy, probably from a struggling family. I think this man needs to be applauded for his magnanimous spirit. He is a wonderful example to privileged Kimberley residents. We cannot live in luxury when our fellow citizens are in squalor.

What I have observed is that those who are abusing this man are also members of various churches in the city. Every Sunday these houses of worship are always full to capacity and most, if not all, worshippers are white. Now how can one be praying to God and still be

racist? This does not make sense at all. Any worthy Christian should stand up and defend this man.

I appeal to my fellow residents to desist from ugly acts of racism. I am also appealing to the authorities to investigate these incidents and bring the perpetrators to book as a matter of urgency.

Larry Pickover

Hadison Park

He read the letter again, looking for any spelling mistakes and grammatical errors. He then counted the words to see whether he had not exceeded the prescribed three-hundred words limit.

“This editor must be very happy that this time I’m not complaining about his reporters,” Pickover thought.