

Part A: Thesis

Love in Confusion: a novella

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Abstract

In my novella, I explore love, intimacy, obsession, sex and how we think with regards to conceptualising gender, in all its diverse forms. These four concepts are guided by gender which then impacts gender performance or that which is expected by society. We can further state that, these four concepts relate to gender and gender narrations of which, the novella navigates through. It does this by presenting and engaging various scenarios, which seek to afford the reader, an analysis of their own. While I draw some inspiration from romance novels which present the platform to paint love in a fantastical and romanticised light, the thesis approaches it from, a more realistic and critical perspective in simple, everyday language. Love in my story can be magical and wonderful at times but it can also be ugly, violent and not returned.

The central character is a strong young woman who is navigating her own gender and sexuality. Much of the narrative unfolds in an urban setting, moving from the city to the township as the protagonist searches for love and excitement.

The work is inspired by many writers. Aimee Parkison and Diane Williams inspire me because, they use creative forms to show unique feminists' perspectives of the world.

Amanda Michalopoulou reveals what goes on in minds of female characters and connects everyday life with important political problems.

I have also drawn from Marguerite Duras, who uses simple and poetic writing to explore love and desire in a thoughtful and deep manner. Lastly, I am influenced by Jordan Castro, who points a dark and clever picture of city life and explores the complicated nature of love in a world driven by technology.

Chapter One

Amanda stood outside the gate, frozen in disbelief.

Did she really kick me out? Well, perhaps kick out would be an exaggeration. One expects more from a lover. I expected more... more empathy, more affection - internal conversations, they call them. She kept glancing back at the door, hoping Nicky would change her mind. Hoping that she had come rushing after her and they would regain that spark they once shared together. *Surely, under the magical spell that connected us, she would not have let me go.* She tried to convince herself ... or rather, console herself. But no, this love story was not to have a happy ending. Did they ever?

She started to walk, finding some reprieve in the beautiful sky. The darkness above her was punctured by stars and the air was filled with warmth. For a moment, she drifted away from her disappointment in her lover - well, ex-lover now, as it would be. In truth, that is why she had opted to come outside. She did not want to feel the suffocation of the house or the coldness she received from her lover. She found solace in the stars and the soothing whispers of the wind.

She knew her lover would offer a different interpretation to this scenario. Nicky would blame Amanda for not being reasonable, for always escalating things with no regard for what actually happened. What they call blowing things out of proportion. She never liked that idiom, especially not now, when she was trying to blow off steam. Anyway, proportions and the different senses and sizes of them was another story, for another day.

Amanda found herself singing the classic old Brian Adams song ‘... *Oh, once in your life, you find someone who would turn your world around...bring you up when you are feeling down...baby you are all that I want when you are lying here in my arms.... I’ve been waiting for you...*’ These lines might have been relevant to her lover an hour ago. Right now, however, she was more at that Pink song ‘.... *Why do we fall in love so quickly?*’

This was Amanda in a nutshell. A music fanatic: every moment defined and described by some song. She carried all the good music in the world in her head. But she was not going to reveal her favourite artist of all time. At least not yet. It is still too soon....

I should have seen the red flag from that, she thought. Nicky was not actually familiar with her favourite artist. She did not know her! And that was putting it politely. How could she have thought they would make it? That she was the one? Perhaps she could blame desperation? Before Nicky she had always been perfectly at ease with the state of single and mingle. She knew only too well the dangers of the fantasy of true love perpetuated by the system. That was another characteristic of Amanda's - she was an intellectual, not a delusional romantic. She was a love fanatic realist.

The taxi driver texted, apologising for yet another 15 minutes delay. It had been twenty minutes now, standing outside the gate of her ex-lover, who had not bothered to check on her or call her to find out if she was safely home yet. Granted this hood was not Kasi but it also was not the burbs, thought Amanda, shifting from one foot to the next. The street was sunken in darkness and shadows loomed further down near the concrete bridge, one minute away from where she now stood. She tried to distract herself with the beauty of the night sky - all those stars!

She turned back to her phone and texted the driver, "It's fine." She did not have a choice. In such instances, one must humble oneself and be very cooperative because, should one complain, the driver might just decide to go home, and he happens to be the last car operating! It was one of those realities here, the transport business was very third grade. You were lucky to get a taxi after 10pm! So this guy, at 1:30 am was a life saviour.

Mandy's mind went back inside the house.

"Ok, it's fine, tell me when you get home safe." Those were the heart-shattering words Nicky had uttered to her. She did not stop there, she had to make the cut deeper. "I'm going to bed. I won't see you out, I'm cold."

Indeed, it was late, and she probably was cold, but Mandy digested the cold from a different angle. It had nothing to do with Nicky's literal cold in her head. She saw it as an emotional cold, a cold that froze the idea of their love, love she so hoped for.

Let us engage Nicky's version, the one she describes as a "misunderstanding." When she said, "yes, we can see each other," she didn't mean, "tonight". So poor Mandy, after finishing her shift at the restaurant, requested the staff transport to drop her off at Nicky's. In her mind, this was just to see her. She had no intention of sleeping over. Little did she know that in less than an hour she would end up standing outside waiting for the taxi. That extension would have been ideal, had she been holding Nicky's hand ... chatting ... touching and loving. She smiled at the picture in her head as she felt the soft sensation of Nicky's skin against hers - a feeling that now had to be stashed into the memory box. Of course, she would never want to touch someone who treated her like that again. She knew she could not trust her with her heart. She was not the one to dance in the rain with, not the one to count the stars with, the one to write love letters to.

"Please can you open the gate for me? I'm going to wait outside."

"No Mandy, wait inside, it's not safe."

“But I can’t stand your coldness right now. I feel like I’m suffocating your space and bringing nothing but boredom.”

“I didn’t say that! You are always like this, always making me feel like I am the one in the wrong.”

“Is that how you have been feeling all this time?”

“You see! There you go again! Making me feel bad for being honest with you and exaggerating my words.”

“You make me sound like I have been an unfeeling person, like someone who doesn’t get you. Ok, please just open the gate for me.”

“How far is your driver? I will wait a bit.”

Mandy checked her messages...nothing.

“Listen, this guy is delaying. Please just open the gate for me.”

Nicky sighed, got up and threw away the blanket, her short gown revealing her thighs. For a moment Mandy had this burning urge of desire to forget their disagreement, to just grab her and say, “lie on top of me for one second before I go.” But the cold of zero affection in that lounge froze that image. So, instead she followed Nicky as she proceeded towards the gate to open the lock that closed the lock to her heart.

“Tell me when you get home safe.” In this context, those words sounded like mockery coming from her lover. Oh! Ex-lover!

As if the night was not bad enough for Mandy, the light next door came on, and an old white man, the neighbour, she guessed, peered out the gate.

“What are you doing here so late? I am going to call security if you don’t go.”

The fury in her rose to maximum capacity. *This guy does not even greet or humanly ask what is going on, instead he poses the threat of calling security because surely, as a black woman, I am a threat to his property. So, I am here to steal from him. Little did he know that the only thing I had come to steal here was my lover’s heart*, Mandy thought, trying to return to a place of mental calmness instead of directing this third-grade human to the hell bus.

Mandy was an intellectual and that meant she was very much aware of the contemporary political situation; the economical and racial issues of the country, rooted in the deadly past of the former apartheid regime. A regime that had been succeeded by a government full of corruption and mismanagement which was nothing new because the old regime was also based on that ... the only difference is this government is fooling the majority. In the era of gender-based violence, one would expect that a decent human being seeing a woman standing on the gate, in the early hours of the morning, would respond from a place of care. Is the woman safe? Did something happen to her? Does she need some help? That would be a decent initial reaction to the scenario. But no, protected behind his locked gates, with an

alarm system and two dogs, he feels the need to make his safety the main concern. Feel free to think Mandy has exaggerated once again ... as her ex-lover Nicole seems to think.

Mandy's Nicky would never again be Nicky but Nicole. Yes, her name has always been Nicole, but she loved calling her Nicky, as she called her Mandy. The whole thing had a lame rhyme and they loved it that way ... Mandy babe ... Nicky babe. It would be her first heartbreak at varsity. She had always heard people talk about heartbreaks but could never relate. A heart could stop, how did a heart break after all? Now she felt it. It was very strange how the heart literally hurts. How does it know how to feel that way? You cannot even reason with it.

She lay home safe in her crib. It did not matter how hard she tried to contain them, how hard she tried to defeat the tears. *She cannot break my heart and make me cry. I cannot be a double victim.* She tried consoling herself by applying logic. But logic and love can never be in the same sentence. That is just the naked truth. And one critical thing Mandy was not going to do was to follow the instructions of informing madam Nicole that she had arrived home safe! If she ever cared about her, she would at least try to find out.

It was only in the morning when she saw Nicole's texts, enquiring if she got home safe. She had not replied, so she had sent more than one. "Please just even react with an emoji to indicate that you are safe if you don't want to talk to me. I do not want to be the last person to have seen you," her last message read. Mandy did not know how to encapsulate this message. It seemed to come from a place of care yet at a cold angle. It was still about her. She was trying to protect her feelings if the worst had happened. "Selfish," Mandy thought. But for the sake of her own peace of mind and sanity, she sent an emoji. Just to get her off her back. She felt a moment of relief after doing that. It was like sealing the final chapter. And for a moment, she knew, this separation was a good thing.

Chapter 2

We shoot. You were shot.

We are dust.

You were dusted.

We clean.

You were cleaned.

We choose.

You were chosen.

We live.

You left.

We aim.

You were aimed at.

We suck.

You were sucked.

No matter how many times Mandy said the lines to herself, she never got used to it. Never adjusted to referring to Sindiswa in the past tense. We shoot, she thought. You were shot.

Sindiswa was Amanda's first heartbreak. She was an only child but had lots of cousins who filled the sibling gap. To this day, she still wonders how it would feel to call another 'ngane ka mah or ngane kababa'. God did not grant her that privilege. So, she turned to Sindiswa - a favourite cousin who played the role of sister, bigger sister. Their blood relation was close because Sindiswa's late father was brothers with Mandy's grandpa.

Mandy looked up to her in so many ways. Sindiswa always seemed so knowledgeable, especially with the things of the street, as they say. She was familiar with boys and dating. She would tell Mandy stories about boys and give her tips on how she should start dating. She even promised to pick the right boy for her.

Mandy never managed to muster any enthusiasm to start dating boys. But because she loved Sindiswa so much, she never expressed those feelings. So, she always agreed with her because, according to Mandy, Sindiswa could never be wrong.

Sindiswa's death sent shock waves through the community. Almost like those horrible ID reality shows - it is fine if you do not know them. Sindiswa was shot dead in the forest, 10 minutes away from her school. She was doing grade 11 and it was during final examination time. Her boyfriend believed she was cheating - which she was not. They had been dating for nine months.

Sindiswa's mother never recovered from the 'namhla senza umlando' experience. Same applied to Mandy. She never got used to using the past tense for her cousin. Never got used to saying we shoot; you were shot.

So it was that Amanda, who was always a strong black girl, got stronger as she grew. She was an intelligent child with an eye for art and books. She loved reading. She was never too big on the games played outside but she would participate now and then. She recalled one of her aunt's observations "And the way you also love reading, you are definitely going to be a doctor! The handwriting is proof." She always smiled when recalling this. She was teased for her bad handwriting...to this day in fact! She became used to the mockery but always assured her aunt that she did not want to be a doctor at all. "I am a people's person aunt ... I love seeing happy people, now why would I become a doctor to see sad and sick people for the rest of my life? Nobody goes to the doctor because they are happy," she would reason with her aunt, who in turn would laugh it off.

Amanda's childhood can be classified as middle class. In fact, her family was considered rich in the area. She felt blessed in that sense, blessed not to be born poor, not to have to struggle. She was raised on land that had belonged to her grandfather: a well-established and educated man. He is now deceased. "Oh, what a void you have left in my life, grandpa." Mandy often travelled down memory lane, tears welling in her eyes.

She grew up on their farm, where almost every resident was family, aside from those who worked the land. They specialised in maize, beans, cabbage and potatoes. They also had milking cows and ran a shop and a bottle store. For a while, everyone on the farm got their supplies at Mandy's. Eventually competition arose, and people started to open spazas. Some survived, some failed and always the customers would return to the main source: at Mandy's!

Her late legendary grandfather's house was named "Esidokolweni," meaning a place of hard work. He was a hard worker and always instilled the same practice in others. The lazy couch potatoes labelled him a difficult person who does not want to see people just relaxing. That included Mandy's dad. He would always moan, "Aaah uTata yini manje," whenever Mandy went to his room to say, "Grandpa is calling."

An only child, Mandy grew up with her grandparents. Her mother left to work in the city, while her father remained, assisting with the running of things - driving the tractor during planting season and driving to town to stock up for the shop and bottle store.

Mandy thought her father's life was very mundane. He had always been a lazy man, always complaining about having to execute the above-mentioned two tasks. The only exercise he thoroughly enjoyed was holding a bottle in his hand. Those were the moments he treasured

most. And that is also the only time he ever said anything. If he had no bottle in hand, no words came out of his mouth. It was as if the bottle was the 'unmute' button.

Mandy was never traumatised by his behaviour as some other girls might have been, to the extent of requiring a shrink at a later stage in life to discuss 'her father never being there for her' vibes. Maybe that is why she became strong at a young age ... Or maybe it was her grandfather who filled the father gap exceptionally well, executing the role with flying colours. To her, grandpa was father. And he adored her! As his first grandchild, she was the apple of his eye. He tried his utmost to teach her life's lessons. He never lectured per se, instead couching his lessons in idioms and parables. This is something Mandy learned from him. As they say, 'we learn from the best.'

From a young age, her grandfather directed her towards church. He was not a hectic church person, but he was an intrinsic believer. Hence at least one Sunday a month, he took her to the service. And every night at home, after dinner, the whole family gathered in the sitting room to sing and thank God for the day.

This was another activity her father found exhausting. The only time he participated in the evening prayer was when he was sauced beyond repair. And he would then request his favourite song to be sung by Mandy. The fulfilment of this request was dependent on Grandma. If she was in a good mood, she would allow it, otherwise, she would just signal to Mandy to shut her mouth.

Her grandma was not a very religious person. Yes, she was raised Catholic and all but had since distanced herself from the church. She did not see it as a priority. Perhaps, she thought God had given her enough in life: an exceptional husband and money. As mentioned, by this community's standards, they were rich. She was a materialistic person. And it did not help that she was also exposed to education. She had been a teacher and even a principal at some point. So, one can just imagine the triple decker of arrogance. She was what they call a 'diva' in today's language. To her, only money mattered, and she engaged people according to their pockets. Mandy would later come to classify her as 'classist.'

Mandy enjoyed driving with grandpa, going to church and so forth. She loved the walks they took, often to watch the cows come home. She loved to help him milk the cows, although she never managed to master the skill. All she did was hold the rope that tied their legs so that they did not kick and spill the milk. She could count the times she herself had touched the teats of a cow. They always felt very soft and tender, and she was awed at the thought that what was coming out of those breasts was something people looked forward to consuming. Perhaps, her love for breasts developed during those moments! Another story!

Chapter 3

It is convenient how the system, by milking the idea that ‘education is key’, conceals the truths of the real world. It is all good and well to attend ‘prestigious’ institutions of higher learning, but the degree ticket does not automatically grant access to the corporate world. This is a sad truth.

She watched too many of her friends celebrate their graduation only to end up sitting at home. Or worse, in the bar or shebeen using their B.Comms to calculate their growing debts. And while she herself escaped the unemployed graduate group, she did come to discover that her degree had very little to do with what she ended up doing. Which is not to say she did not apply her learning, but because she was Mandy, she applied it slant, in her own way. She was a Bachelor of Social Science holder ... identified as an autodidact on various life matters and more importantly, an intellectual.

“Reading opens up one’s mind to worlds that no school can impart,” Mandy would often think when having DMCs with herself. She regularly had such conversations and made a point of actively practising self-motivation. She was her own walking Oprah and a fierce advocate for the distinction between ‘education’ and ‘knowledge.’ At the heart of it all, she maintained that the system had gotten it wrong. It is not education, but knowledge that is the key. *Well, who knows, maybe the confusion was intended by the system* she would think to herself.

She was deep in one of these conversations with herself when her phone rang, breaking her train of thought. When she saw the number on the screen, her heart skipped a beat. “Anti ufunani manje?” she muttered. This is because her paternal aunt never called simply to chat about the weather or well-being. Her calls were always very formal, bearing either bad or good news - nothing in between. One’s best shot was just to ride on the optimistic stick and hope for the latter.

“Hello Aunty, kunjani?”

“I am fine, thank you and you.” Her aunt always preferred English over *vernac* - a tool she used to suss out people based on class. She belonged in the era when speaking English through your nose signified intelligence. The era when model C schools were the future. When black parents were perfectly fine with their children going to model C schools. Fine with them speaking ‘better’ English than they did, and being unable to communicate with their grandparents, and with their poor cousins who went to government schools where mother tongue and *vernac* dominated.

These disparities fired Mandy's belief in the urgency of reading and feeding the self with knowledge. She might not have had grand goals to save the world, so to speak, but she did want to make a few changes - on any level possible and in any form. Hence, she believed in kindness. "Just being kind to one person is already making change in a world that is so terribly unkind," she would meditate.

She was also aware that the regressive mind-sets that favoured English was a legacy of the previous political commotion, whose prejudices trickled down into present day socio-economic

misfortunes. Mandy usually told her friends, "Poverty mentality is also a danger my guys, iyingozi kabi imind poverty." Mandy had a vast variety of friends that she hung out with for different reasons. And these ones were from the 'mind starved' group.

"As Jesus said, it is the sick that need the doctor," she would mock them, provoking small eruptions of jolly laughter. She loved these moments of mockery because they provided a way to educate friends slyly. There would be critical moments when they would face situations that required an emotional intelligence response, and then they would say "Guys let's use Mandy's school of thought" As much as everybody laughed at her mockery - the underlying message remained instilled. And those were very precious moments to Mandy. Emotional moments filled with pleasure. And she would have to force every inch of her body not to shed a tear.

"You must tell your mother to buy you a ticket to JHB this Friday. You have an interview with a recruiting agent on Monday ... get back to me once you have spoken with your mother. Goodbye." That was her aunt, brief and to the point. Mandy took a moment to digest this bomb-drop, realising that whatever follow up questions she may have had, the source that detonated it was gone. *How am I going to answer the dozen questions mom is going to ask? Maybe, she will think, ngifuna ukum'robha imali!* Mandy thought out loud.

What followed would be another adventurous chapter of Mandy's life. She had never imagined in a million years that she would end up residing with her aunt, Nomhle, who was known in the entire family for being strict and never bending to anyone. Her only son was the unfortunate direct recipient of her unyielding being. He was raised like a project! Like in a capitalist market where investors invest in a project and expect profits.

Mandy always felt for her cousin, Zuko. Nomhle was blessed in that she was given an obedient son who does not have it in him to defy his mother. He was almost robotic. Perhaps, it was because she oppressed his spirit under Christianity with immediate effect. The Sabbath! A very strict set up, very closed net, operating almost like a gang – the difference was that there was no physical bloodshed.

"Zuko you are going to be a CA because there are very few black CAs," his mother would brainwash him.

“But mah, I want to be a lawyer.”

“No, you are going to be a CA because your grandfather had a Bachelor of Commerce”.

Her aunt was the kind of parent who lived their lives through their offspring. “This defies the very principle of individualism. Only God sets out one’s plan. Parents should not act like Him and make plans on behalf of their children to resuscitate their failed dreams,” Mandy would caution some of her friends who already had children ... well, a kid or so.

Now you can imagine why Mandy was intrigued by what lay ahead. The whole set- up was weird and every family member thought she was not going to last a month, living under the same roof as her aunt. Mandy was known for her radical stance and sometimes ‘yolo’ vibes. Not exactly complimentary with aunt’s suffocation. And to make matters worse, she was fresh from varsity which is the climax of one’s freedom. “It doesn’t get better than varsity,” she reiterated internally.

She realised she was at crossroads: swim or sink and she most definitely was not going to be Titanic about it. So, she made up her mind to be compliant. It was just a temporary situation. Yes, six months did not feel so temporary, but the end- product might well be worth it. She had to cut off social life, no visiting friends, no friends coming over...no going out. Six months of attending Sabbath. The last one was a mile and a half because she was used to attending church on Sundays. The Saturday thing was never going to jam well with her.

But her aunt was very clear on the matter. “Everyone under this roof goes to the church I go to. We are Sabbath in this house. Once you move out, you can go Sundays.” Big full stop!

“But mama, ngisonta Sundays mina.”

“I know my daughter, but listen to your aunt, she’s helping you.” Her mom offered soothing words to help her accept the situation. So, Mandy quickly got over the fuss and decided to embrace the present she had been presented with. She did not want to come across as ungrateful for her aunt’s kindness.

Her aunt was willing to take her in for six months, no rent, no food, no electricity contributions ... only petrol money as she drove her to work. Now that was a miraculous deal.

“I want you to start off good. You must save every cent, so that when you move out, you are able to afford rent and deposit and buy furniture. You must live close to work, and Sandton is very expensive. That is why I am giving you this break. It is not to buy take-away food. We carry lunch to work, by the way” - another mini lecture from her aunt.

Mandy was happy for her cousin’s company. At least it was not just her and Nomhle. There was a normal person in the house to chat to now and then, although he was hardly readily available as he was finishing off his articles and preparing to be a CA. Her Aunt’s dream had come true while his had been crushed. Hardly surprising then that Zuko was thrilled by her

arrival. For years he had been the sole recipient of his aunt's repression. He needed Mandy's presence more than she needed his.

Nomhle was a single parent. Zuko did not have any relationship with his father. He never spoke about it. There were moments when a certain situation would involve the word 'father', and Mandy always made sure to change her wording because, deep down, she could see Zuko still hurt. He had always been curious about how their life would have been had his father been around perhaps. It would be the only time he spoke about his dad. "Sometimes I wonder if my mother would have been this crazy had my dad been around. I feel she is like this because she has nobody to be accountable to, if you know what I mean ... It is always her way or no way. It's very frustrating Cuz."

Mandy would hold her tears back. She felt his pain. In her case, as non-existent as her own father was, he is at least still physically there. "Not sure which one is worse," she tried consoling her Cuz. Mandy knew that Zuko loved her father, his uncle. He subconsciously saw him as a father figure. He loved the fact that he resembled him, tall and all. This resemblance was one of the reasons Zuko always handed down his nice expensive clothes to his uncle - emembhulela as we say, and they would still be in excellent condition. Every time her father saw his nephew in *his* clothes, you could read the joy flowing from his face. Those were priceless moments for Mandy. The ones that made the 'family' experience.

Her aunt and cousin had two beautiful dogs, which Mandy fell in love with. These would be her new and only buddies for the next six months. If she were not reading or watching some gospel show, after errands of course, she would be chilling and playing with Bruno and Milo.

"Stop it Bruno ... don't play like that," she would reprimand. Milo was very sweet and soft, and Bruno always took advantage of her. She always wanted her way. Mandy always secretly joked that Bruno was her aunt and Milo her cuz.

She appreciated how the rest of the Sabbath family welcomed her in their region of the West Rand. She benefited from the high esteem everyone held her aunt in. "Oh, you are Nomhle's niece, welcome." She heard those words every church session. She did not mind, as they seemed to come from a good place.

To Mandy - a radical but also a heavy believer in Christ - the Sabbath church is rather rigid. For Mandy, Christianity was a way of life as opposed to a religion. Religion causes a lot of confusion. "It just functions like the political system with its bureaucracy and protocols," she would justify her stance when confronted by the ultra-religious.

For example, her new church had protocols on how to dress: jewellery was not allowed; the most conservative did not even wear wedding rings. They were also very strict on diet, which was at least one thing she did not object to. The Sabbath establishment also bordered on sexism with men and women having definitively different roles.

But the rule that really stood out the most for Mandy was the marriage thing. There were only three lanes here: married, engaged or in courtship. There was no in between. You could not just be single and not looking for a relationship. And of course, a relationship was a thing only between a man and a woman. This put a lot of pressure on the youth to get married at

early stages of their lives, some of them before they even discovered who they were, what their lives were about ... They committed those undefined lives to someone else. A recipe for misery! It seems they practised the 'average 2.1' human being principle as presented by society. That fallacy which creates a future lineage for an individual. For example, to say, at this age, one should have done a, b, c at this age, achieved e, f, g ... so that at that age, they live an x, y, z life! Study ... get a fancy job ... marry ... have 2.9 kids ... drive a fancy car ... rent a fancy apartment ... and live happily ever after. Anyway.

So, you can imagine how much of a stranger Mandy felt in this environment. Her core values were against everything mentioned above. Life was a journey full of ups and downs. The most important thing was that it be enjoyed under all circumstances ... meaning one must prioritise peace of mind! That concept of 'it is well with my soul.' The world would certainly be a better place if everyone enforced the soul concept, Mandy would preach. And the good thing about the soul concept is that you did not have to be Christian or belong to any other religion to subscribe to it. It was just a person's journey to self-actualization.

Of course, her Cuz Zuko followed these Sabbath rules. He was in courtship. And the other critical thing was that you must date within the establishment. So good luck if you happen to find love outside of the Sabbath establishment and the person does not want to convert or anything. In fact, this was the exact scenario with Zuko and his first love. She was not Sabbath, so they eventually broke up. For some reason Mandy knew how much he loved his first sweetheart, Karabo. No other girl could ever live up to her. So, all his other courtships always ended in failure.

However, Mandy liked to imagine a scenario where this would have a happy ending. In her story, Zuko grew up and moved out of his mother's place. He became more independent and realised his happiness came first and that he was just a human being not a perfect human being! He went back to Karabo and they conceived before marriage. This of course would be a huge heartbreak to Mandy's aunt. In Mandy's version of the future, her aunt's great project failed. Zuko defied her teachings in a public manner. A manner that could not be reversed or swept under the carpet. She was heartbroken. Mandy did not want to wish pain on her aunt through her storytelling but deep down knew that she brought it upon herself by being too controlling over Zuko. He was like a caged bird, that when freed, would fly without ever looking back!

Chapter Four

It was a beautiful spring night, that typical beauty with a warm breeze, where the magic of the night outshines that of day. The lights were bright and high like palm trees. The parking lot was parked to the max, uber drivers battling to just locate a spot for a drop off as more people are coming ... some in groups ... some couples ... the wonders! The common denominator was that everyone looked free and ready to have some fun. Fancy cars of many variations and models were on display. It was a Friday after all.

Sandton City's Santis Club was nicknamed the 'Take me Home' club. "Damn, that's exactly what I need. I want to be motherless tonight." Mandy smiled at the notoriety of her thoughts. It had been six months of sobriety and no fucks at her aunt's place. Tonight, she was smelling the freedom on the wind. She was going, going, gone with the wind indeed!

She had the Mula. Payday baby! She was ready to spend and mingle.

"maZet, we're definitely hitting the streets babe. We're painting Sandton red tonight."

"Your levels of excitement are scaring me, Mandy. It's like, we gonna die tonight." They laughed.

"I get what you mean ... have always believed impulsiveness is best but tonight, we expand that thought babe."

"Am sooooo game ... where is my red lipstick? A girl never goes wrong on red lipstick. It's an unwritten rule."

"Yeah, right maZet, as if I would know cause I use it often, right?" They both popped at Mandy's unique brand of sarcasm. Lipstick had never been her thing.

"Geez, shoot me for thinking you love me so much."

"Shooting right back with that love babe," Mandy responded as she handed over the lipstick.

Zanele, maZet as she called her, was Mandy's heaven-sent housemate. A beautiful in and out young woman. As soon as they met, after months of Mandy searching and viewing, she knew Zanele was the one. There were so many energy synergies that she had been certain Zanele felt the same. Hence, they did not prolong with the *I will get back to you* vibes. They proceeded straight to the paperwork that sealed the deal to become housemates.

Always alert of the system daylight robbery, Mandy was not about to rent an apartment in Sandton alone. *The address is very important in Jozi, so when yours says Sandton, trust me you gonna cough out* she thought. Not to mention, the whole initial double payment of rent and deposit! It just made the money even bigger. Even though you are told you'd get back your deposit, only a few people were very lucky to actually get it in full. These estate agents always cook up some story in order to deduct some money. But in Mandy's case, that was not a problem. That was the moment she felt blessed that her aunt had prepared her for this. She had enough money in her bank account. It was all just smooth transactions.

As much as she knew she should share accommodation, Mandy was not a personal sharer. maZet had almost everything in the apartment and genuinely offered her use to all.

“You don’t have to bring anything except a bed my darling. I have everything.”

“Thank you so much but I would rather start my own collection babe ... am an artist, remember.”

“Whatever turns you on, Mandy.” Simultaneous bursts of laughter as they hugged.

Mandy was not a fan of shopping and that Wednesday afternoon would be her longest shopping extravaganza to date. She could not dodge the bullet nor assign someone to it. She bought a bed, a comfortable and expensive leather couch, modern fridge, microwave, three bright orange ottomans, a big mirror, an average size powerful speaker and the rest of your basic utensils and cutlery. She was happy the big stuff was now taken care of. This exercise took a huge chunk from her bank balance as she paid cash for everything. But every time she looked at her stuff, she was convinced the dent in her bank balance was worth it.

Their apartment was a cosy and neat space. Almost everything was in doubles. The only thing Mandy did not bother about was a television. She did not care about TV, but it was nice that maZet already had a big whatever-centimetre one.

“My glass is almost finished babe. Should I request an uber,” Mandy called on maZet who was putting final touches with her eyelashes, seeking glamour.

“Yes babe, I will blame you for crooked eyelashes at the club because you are rushing me.”

“Please do, my bully.”

They never missed a moment of sarcasm or a chance to share a laugh. It is of course an unspoken tradition to always have pre drinks before going out, but not too much. You do not want to arrive there staggering, as much as you cannot arrive dead sober or you will be very bored for the first hour. Hence the club scene is not for everyone. Some people get very agitated.

The intercom buzzed at the gate. A minute later, they were coming down the stairs from their third story - another initial enticer for Mandy when she came to view the place. She loved a bit of a view and anyways ground apartments were the worst cause the notorious always throw stuff down - rubbish, cigarette stompies, you name it - and it lands outside your place.

“Sizok'bona later baba,” they waved at the security gate guy - always a friendly guy. Mandy made a point of seeing those rendered ‘unseen’ as it were. She and security had thus developed a small friendship; when she normally returned from work, she bought cool drink and bread, and they had a mini chat about their days.

The club scene took Mandy back to her wild varsity days. The difference was that, this was a first-grade club, not your varsity club. The music was pumping, house music. There was something about this genre of music, exceptionally intrinsic to South African Kasi culture,

which gives life to your bones! Granted, music does that in general. But house ... house music in the club is the future. It was that cherry on top. The top that popped Mandy's cherry.

It was a beat that affords one to move...to flirt and Feba! '...dedela umzimba'.... the dance floor is on flames. You would swear there was a prize at stake. But for now, Mandy and Zanele were taking it slow. "The aim is not to sweat baby," Mandy screamed at maZet. Another feature of the club scene. You can never speak at room temperature levels. You must shout above the music.

Mandy scans the scene, eyes alert, and alights on her immediately. Perfect short hair with the famous Madiba line and mild red lipstick. Not applied in that typical 'screaming at you' red. But that, 'I know my story, know your story,' unsaid boundary. Strong energies of confidence with zero base of arrogance. *You can see, she is comfortable in that space... she owns it.*

For a moment, Mandy sobered up. Their eyes locked and Mandy immediately changed views because she did not want the 'I know your story,' woman to think she was a creep or even worse, a stalker. *Ahhh man, of course, a beautiful number like her is used to all sorts of attention... probably none of it grabs her attention anymore.* This thought cut like a knife because, the truth was, all she wanted right then, was *her* attention. She took a big gulp from her drink to shake off the flippen nerves.

C'mon Mandy, what happened to you, bra? You own this game...what have these six months off the streets done to you? You've never been scared of ingane before? Another big gulp restored her tipsy mood. *Dayum I can't believe just a glance at her made me sober ...* She decided to stop thinking. She thought the angel could read her thoughts.

"What took you so long maZet, you making me look like a flippen creep girl," She lashed out at an innocent soul.

"Dude, ukhuluma ngani? And why do you lookin like you flippen shaking? Are you sloshed already mfethu?" maZet bursts into laughter.

"Am glad you finding this funny."

"Ok, this looks serious, lemme compose self. Am sorry babe, the queue was long in the ladies ... bitches starting makeup and all. Tell me what happened? Do you wanna sit down?" She looked at the table maZet suggested, worrying if she would still have a view of *her*. "Nah, we good standing right here." maZet would soon know the reason for the refusal as she updated her on what happened.

First thing she did, was laugh at her. "Ncooh man, this is so cute ... you look cute ... just go halla at her. She doesn't look like she bites. Angels don't bite right?"

"Am sooooo gonna get you back for this maZet ... making a mockery of my pain."

"Never baby girl, never. Am gonna call her to join us."

"NO. Please don't. That would be a bit weird."

Another gulp as if that would be the source of strength for what to do next.

“I am going to go there.”

“Good. Is it going to be THIS year?”

“Fuck you dude. Please stop being mean to me maZet. It hurts. I really wanna talk to her. I want to know her name ... hear what her voice sounds like ... ask her where she got that beautiful hair cut ... why that line and how beautifully it suits her ... do you get that mfethu?”

“Am sorry baby. I completely understand how serious this is now, I promise, no more teasing you ... somebody just got captured”. They locked in a warm hug, maZet caressed her back as assurance that everything would be ok.

Then bingo, it was load shedding. For a moment it went completely dark in the club before the generator kicked in. Of course, everybody knew this but when you have got a group of people and booze involved, drama is bound to happen. They like to ‘spice’ things up because everybody just screams like the lights are never coming back and their lives are now at risk! And all Mandy is thinking about is *her*. “I wonder what she looks like in the dark.”

“I saw you,” a warm soft voice whispers near Mandy’s ear.

“You did?”

“Yes. And I waited for you. Then I figured, you are probably very shy. So, I came. How are you?”

“Mmh ... eem ... you’ve caught me out of breath ... am sorry ... geez, please don’t tell me you can see, I am literally frozen.”

“I can feel it ... I love it. Frozen warmth. You soo warm. Name, please. I can’t walk here *and* still be the first to introduce self, you understand mos?”

“My name is Amanda, Mandy on a regular day.”

“My name is Sihle. Are we going to be meeting on a *regular*?” They both laughed, catching the little joke.

And she was not dreaming. She had just officially met Sihle. She stood so close behind her with both arms wrapped around her waist, leaning closely to her ear and caressing her stomach ... or what Mandy would call ‘a six pack’. She believed she had got a six pack. Anyway, it was just like that one missing piece in a puzzle. She embraced her soft warm touch by also caressing all over her hands and arms. They locked in silence. Mandy was tempted to just turn around and seal the embrace with a kiss, but she did not want to move too fast and at the same time, she did not want to let go of the moment. Sihle was not just holding her, she was sheltering her ... perhaps she could shelter her heart too. She was ready. Sold!

Perhaps the universe agreed to this union as a popular house song started ‘Sebefuna Dayi Deng ’ Mandy and Sihle were locked and lost in their world.

As she slowly returned to reality, she spotted maZet by the dance floor with a guy whom she seemed happy vibing with. MaZet signalled her their secret code lingo. It was an approval. Green tick! Mandy smiled back and waved her goodbye. She turned around, finally unlocked ... holding Sihle's hand tight as they proceeded to walk towards the door.

Later, Mandy would remember the rest of the evening like walking into a love song, everything was beat and melody and lyricism.

Mandy's apartment had never felt so warm and homely. She felt like she had known Sihle for a very long time and she was never going to part with her.

She had offered her a glass of wine when they got home, an invitation, Sihle warmly welcomed it with a dash of sarcasm. "It's okay baby, you don't have to get me drunk. Am here already," she murmured softly into her ear as they curled up wrapped in a light pullover on Mandy's leather couch. She had this random thought about the couch. She believed she had indeed bought it for her and Sihle to snuggle on because she had never shared it like this with anyone before.

Sihle had the most beautiful legs according to Mandy. The kind that were not so much athletic in shape. It was as if, they were tamed and groomed by horse riding. *Fit lengane madoda* she thought, secretly smiling. She surely could not share that thought with her. She was not certain of how her reaction would be. She sat horizontally with her thighs and legs on Mandy's lap and her arm wrapped around her neck.

There was a long uncommunicated silence between them ... as if they had both travelled to this other universe. Both were just staring and enjoying each other's gaze like they had never seen anything this beautiful before. Neither wanted to be disturbed from this universe. It was their universe alone, only accessible and accessed by them. They held closer and caressed harder in silence.

Mandy's plans of just fucking around took a three sixty-degree turn. She had planned so hard about all the sex she was going to have tonight after the imposed six month of chastity at her aunt's. But she had no desire to have that with Sihle now. She just wanted all of her. She wanted to make sweet tender love to her soft sensational body, from head to toe. She wanted to touch her so gently, as if she were this fragile golden shell, which, if ever broken, could never be mended. She wanted to give her pleasure, returning the pleasure she was feeling with her lips breathing against her ear. Sihle kept doing this magical thing that sent these sharp waves of desire throughout Mandy's entire body, poking her ear with her nose. They were so comfortable in each other's arms and space; you would swear this was not their first encounter. They were best friends and lovers forever.

Their perfect moment in that universe was disturbed by maZet's call, which Mandy knew she could not *not* answer. It is a promise they made never to ignore each other's call, no matter what time or whatever. MaZet informed her that she was going home with the very same hunk they left her with. She sent a proper picture of him and his number plate. Yes, security

comes first, a lot of bad stuff happens at clubs. The creeps who go to clubs to target ‘drunk’ women, for example.

To be honest, she was kind of relieved that she was not coming back! Not in a bad way, of course - she loved her roommate to bits - but she was having the time of her life sharing that whole lounge space with her new lover. MaZet's absence also made her restrain her passions - she knew they could not go overboard on the couch as maZet could walk in anytime.

“Babe, you said, you a music fanatic, neh?” Sihle said.

“Oops, should I be anticipating a music quiz, my love?” They both laughed.

“Not really.”

“Is that a complete answer?” she asked, pulling a scary face at her.

“Oh please, you’re too cute to make that scary face my darling,” Sihle said, kissing her gently on her forehead. “You gonna go get us refills, I’m gonna go press play on that speaker.”

“Not a problem my love. Is there anything you wanna listen to in particular?”

“Nah, I just wanna know where you stand exactly.”

“Mmh ... ok fill me in,” said Mandy with a look of confusion.

“One can always tell a lot about a person purely based on what they are listening to.”

“Ohhhhhhhh that ... I get you babe,” she said, pouring the wine.

“Yeah, ng’funa ukwazi, uyajola or u heartbroken or you a player etc.” Sihle put on her serious expression. They both laughed as she handed her the glass and kissed her on her neck. Tenderly.

Mandy knew exactly which song was going to play next. Based on what Sihle had just said, she was going to figure and classify on the spot, the kind of state she was currently in concerning matters of the emotions! And there it was: Don Williams’ “Some Broken Hearts Never Mend.” The lyrics leave no stone unturned in this beautiful, and one of Mandy’s favourite, country songs.

She could not have wished for another song to be next. This was a perfect song. They danced holding tight to each other, returning to that locked moment again.

When it finished, Sihle whispered, “No one is ever going to break your heart again baby, let us go into the bedroom ... am looking forward to mending it”.

The feeling of pleasure hit deep down to the tip of her toes while opening her heart. It was like Sihle was touching every part of her body, reaching deep inside to discover parts Mandy did not even know she had. She was overwhelmed with both pleasure and joy, breathing with heavy slow sighs. Sihle was kissing her on her nose and her cheeks and her lips and her neck and her breasts and her stomach and her belly and her abdomen and and and ... all she could say, with the little strength she had was, “baby, please don’t ever leave me.” Sihle gently reached for her mouth, touching it soft and closing it to say, “It’s okay baby, you don’t have

to tell me. I will always be here.” In the second wave of magic, Mandy would be the star. She was the explorer.

Afterwards, they lay close against one another in perfect silence. Their bodies, warm and sweaty, hands clasped. Mandy lifted Sihle’s hand, kissed it tenderly and held it against her cheek.

“Babe?” murmured Sihle.

“Yes, babe.”

“There’s something I want to tell you, am just not sure if I should.”

“You can tell me anything, baby. Please never hesitate with that.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, I am sure.”

“Ok.”

There was silence.

“Ok what my love?” Mandy inquired sleepily.

“I love you”, she whispered.

“I loved you the second I laid my eyes on you.”

It was a Monday after payday weekend. Traffic was always a mess on these days, Mandy never understood why. Maybe it is because everyone had a hectic weekend. Still hung over, hence they were late for work, or maybe, like her, they found love and battled to part with their lover in the morning. We shall never know. All she knew was that not even traffic could sway her from the beautiful mood she was in. She still had butterflies in her stomach. She was in love, baby! All those cars jammed in front of her, all had the face of Sihle. She could see her vividly and she was all that she was thinking about. She wondered if Sihle’s route was as jammed as hers. She wondered if she was thinking about her too. She wondered if she had really really *really* meant what she said. *People can say crazy stuff after a beautiful sensational session of love making*, she thinks. She immediately discards that pessimism. She was not about to call her lover a liar now, just out of the blue.

Mandy had always been a punctual person. The standard rule was to at least arrive thirty minutes earlier at work, to afford herself a chance to have a quick cereal breakfast or go to the canteen to grab a sandwich - something she never enjoyed doing. As per her aunt’s teachings, buying food is a waste of money. You should pack both breakfast and lunch. It was also just healthy.

She had landed a job with one of the biggest companies in Sandton. This was a bit weird for Mandy as a Social Scientist. That environment was more for Commerce graduates. But anyway, there she was. Her job title was 'Data Analyst', whatever that meant really. She always found it a joke; these job titles corporate spheres create. She was familiar with this kind of mentality from her academic background - all the 'isms' academics add to a simple word to make it sound complicated and bombastic.

It was her first serious job, and the pay was reasonably ok for entry level. There were rules she had formulated with the guidance of her aunt regarding the office environment:

- You do not make friends.
- You do not involve yourself in other people's work politics.
- You do not engage in office gossip.
- You do not bad mouth your boss to them.
- You do not share your personal life with them.
- You do not lend or borrow money from them.

And she stuck by these religiously, hence she was considered weird. They were so curious about everything regarding her. They were so inquisitive at various degrees. But she made certain these rules remained intact. She made sure she performed her job well and never had anything to discuss with the boss because all work was always on time. So, nobody really knew anything about her.

Corporate exposed her to the devil with its seven horns. Even though, as Mandy got to know, the most dangerous devil was the two-legged one with no horns. She never knew how rotten and raw the system is. As much as it was not her field of study, she was later glad to have been exposed to this environment. The finance environment, as they say, 'money makes the world go round.' This is the mentality the system cultivates in everyone's mind.

This was when Mandy realised varsity sold her a lie. *It is a pity the education system does not share that part of life*, she thought. For a moment, she wanted to demand a refund of fees based on what she had been exposed to. As an ambassador and advocate for a 'better life for all', she wished and prayed for the day the education system encapsulated and endorsed Black Consciousness as a field of study, part of the curriculum, starting from high school.

We have things like 'life orientation', that stuff can and should be replaced with Black Consciousness study. These thoughts describe Mandy's passion for BC. Mandy had written a book, yes, a full complete book, therefore, she was not fooling around when she said she was passionate about this topic and classified herself as an intellectual. Well-read and lit! She had discovered the remedy to what she called 'Political Consolidation', particularly for this country with its 'heavy' history, just to put it politely, even though there was nothing polite about it.

She applied three methods: 1. The Zen concept. Some may have been exposed and have known this concept well, however Mandy had come up with her own interpretation of it, thereby expanding it. Expanding it to volumes which had liberated her. Volumes which had made her see the light, hence the concept for her book. *Oh, I do not even want to think about*

the power struggles of information dissemination when it comes to mainstream media. They do not like anything that is anti their status quo and their status quo is 'don't let them know', Mandy thought, heavy-hearted about the matter. The system does not promote or project anything which opens the eyes of the people, regardless of race, but this obviously hits harder on the black. A very simple explanation of this distinction was the feminist discourse. Not ALL women experience sexism and patriarchy in the same manner. The common denominator is that *all* women are subjected to it.

2. Black Consciousness. The contemporary media has this practice of 'intellectualising' BC. This is a path that is extremely painful to people who really believe in BC. This is because, under this path, the whole entire school of thought is misinterpreted by the system, intentionally so, to serve the purposes and agenda of the new world order.

Stephen Bantu Biko never discriminated against anyone. He devised an inclusive theory and a holistic approach to human harmony. It is not 'exclusively black'. It is engaging of humans. Now, there develops a tug of war surrounding the BC school of thought. You have the white ignorant who think BC is racist and the black ignorant who think BC is for them only. And then, you have academia who think BC is only for the 'clever'. It is too complex a matter to be engaged by anyone. Some doctor or professor must be invited to discuss this discourse. It excludes non-academics. These methods drive us further away from benefiting best from Biko's greatest concept.

These were the major reasons Mandy decided to write the book, hopefully to dismantle all these fallacies and let the next generation learn something outside the gospel. And the culture of reading is deteriorating by the day.

It does not help either when you have an education system which believes 33% means you have mastered your matric and are ready for the world, thought Mandy, shaking her head. *If you do not want your child to belong to the above, you must be willing to cough out a lot of mula, as it seems 'private education' is the only sensible thing most parents prefer. This in turn hits them hard cause some, the 40 % of their salaries go towards paying fees. We have private schools whose fees are equivalent if not more than university fees. Imagine paying the same amount to get a matric as you do for a degree.* Mandy found herself laughing at this, not because it is a laughing matter. She wondered which option she would go for if she had a child. *I would probably just home-school my baboon!*

3. Christianity. As a great believer in God, Jesus Christ, the son, Mandy intertwined this into the above concepts. These affirmed stability, love and humility.

Anyway, Mandy thought, reverting to 'Political Consolidation.', *BC is the key. This is the only remaining concept that needs to be implemented to take this country, South Africa, forward. This is what the leadership of this country, which is currently in shambles, needs to know. We would not be having these high levels of corruption if BC were employed. This is what schools and universities need to teach, to empower the young at an early age. There is a beautiful African idiom which goes 'Lugotywa luselutsha'. The sooner these kids are introduced to the real version of BC, not the system's fluffy one or academia's fancy one, the sooner they will turn out better.*

And the biggest myth is, ‘oh I am not political.’ Every time Mandy heard someone utter the words, her skin would crawl! You can’t NOT be political because everything is political. It is a very naïve and misleading take on one’s life and with BC in place, Mandy thought, we shall never again raise a generation that thinks, ‘it’s not political.’

The other lie Mandy would later learn was that there is nothing great about adulting. It was just billing for days. Your best years in life are your varsity days, not when you start working or the plantation as Mandy refers to it. *So, do not be too eager to grow up, kids,*’ she laughed by herself.

“Hello mama,” she answered her phone. It was always an undeniable pleasure whenever she talked to her mom. And yes, granted, her mother was very worried now that she was no longer under the safe care of her aunt. She was alone in the big city. She wanted her daughter to be safe always, so needless to say, for the first few months, she called every day, more than once.

“Yes, mom, I was going to return your call. I have just been busy. And besides ngiesemesile moos.” They both laugh.

“Ok my beautiful daughter. Have a good day.”

Mandy always melted every time her mother referred to her as a beautiful daughter. This is not because she thought she was not beautiful. There was just something in the way her mom said these words. They were rooted in a place of warmth and love. She could not have asked God for a better mother. Her mother was the one, not perfect but loving. Sometimes it felt like they fought ALL the time, but, ok, that would be another chapter to indulge in.

“It has been a good day indeed.” Mandy murmured after feeling the strain of the emotional heaviness she had just engaged herself in, in the above ‘social reflection’!

She drifted into a mini nap.

Chapter Five

It was a magical encounter. Mandy was a love fanatic, and with Sihle, all her ideals of love had come true. Sihle had arrived in her life like a dream. Like an avalanche. An exploding star. She was ideal - the word perfect could be used but Mandy did not believe in perfect. Only Jesus is perfect. Men were born in sin. But sinful or not, their love was mesmerising. They laughed together. They loved together. They made love together and every moment felt like the first time, the only time, only even better. She finally understood that when one was with someone they love; the love just never gets enough. The more you gave, the more you desired. The more the desire, the greater the love. It becomes a madness, a vicious circle, a suffocation you want. All these thoughts made her miss Sihle even more. Sihle carried the power to make her drift into wonderland - both in her presence and her absence. They could be lying randomly on the couch in silence and Mandy would imagine the whole scene, Sihle, the couch, legs and hands brushing - as if it were a fantasy instead of real life. Lines between things became blurry. In the background of her medulla oblongata, she was humming, 'love is a wonderful thing', that old- time classic song.

Mandy always had a 'seven months rule'. When two people meet and fall in love and embark on a relationship, they go through the honeymoon phase where all is well, bright and pink, perhaps blue. Then slowly all those magical butterflies and smiles subside. Then reality hits. According to Mandy, it was ONLY after seven months that true love kicks in. That is when you consciously decide, *I want to be with this person*. When it is no longer about the magic and yes, the sex. You know the 'Uncle Sam' song *When I See You Smile...*

Sihle was the one who made everything alright for Mandy, the one who made her able to face the world, who made her untouchable. She could not believe how easy it had been; how effortlessly Sihle had just walked into her world. Had Sihle not taken the initiative that night, she wondered, would she have had enough guts to go approach her? Maybe, she would have chickened out and thereby lost out on the love of her life! This was one of the reasons she believed in their love so much. Sihle met her halfway. It was indeed designed in the blue skies, the stars and moon being the witnesses. She felt her attraction from a distance. It was natural and mutual and instantaneous.

So, when seven months had passed, she knew she was there for a lifetime. They even discussed the whole thing of moving in together, which Mandy felt a bit sad about. Not the idea of them but for MaZet. She and MaZet were so close. She did not want to part from her. And she could not bring herself to start that conversation. At the same time, she knew that she was being unrealistic really because the truth is, eventually, they would have to part. It is called paths!

"Awu my love, you want us to be typical lesbians," Mandy joked.

"What do you mean baby?" Sihle enquired.

"Angithi bathi lesbians always move things fast... after one month, they are moving in together, three months later, they are engaged," they both cracked at that.

“Babe, this is my unfounded stats, 80% of lesbians have been engaged in a space of less than a year.” More laughter.

“But that’s good babes, that means, we got soooooooo much love ... society can’t judge us,” responded Sihle.

“Yes, my darling, when we fall, we fall hard and wanna make it permanent.” Giggles.

“Of course, you know my love that waking up next to you for the rest of my life would make me the happiest woman on earth...I am just thinking about maZet.”

After uttering those words, Mandy realised she had just indirectly proposed to Sihle, especially after engaging in the whole lesbian engagement joke. She was anticipating her response. She had never awaited a response from Sihle more eagerly.

“Ncoooh sthandwa sam, yes I will marry you too.”

Sihle just had a way of getting Mandy. They got each other...they always knew what to say to each other, always knew what the other wanted to hear. At that very moment they embraced, hugged, kissed, touched, caressed, undressed, and disappeared into their universe. The indirect proposal was sealed. “Oh baby, your body ... I love touching you ... I love feeling you ... I love the way you come...I breathe you ...” whispered Mandy between the sheets. She found joy in how they never needed a reason to make love. Anytime is teatime as the saying goes. They shared an undeniable craving for each other.

Mandy was from KZN originally, but most of her family had relocated to the City of Gold due to the plantation vibes. But as her mom and dad were not in JHB, they were out of the picture to some extent. Then the scary moment came. Sihle wanted her to meet her parents. The lovely idea terrified her! She had never met anyone's parents before. She had always wondered about that moment - not only the lover’s parents but her own parents being ‘met’... deep sigh! Of course, she was thrilled with the invitation but...

“Don’t panic lover, my parents are 21st century,” Sihle tried to convince her.

“That’s good to hear babe but it doesn’t shake away the scariness.”

“In fact, I think I inherited my gayness from my mother. She’s soo dyke, she doesn’t even know it.” They both burst into the loudest laughter.

Mandy got exactly what Sihle had touched on. It was actually a very sad reality. The whole concept of patriarchy and how women are groomed to marry men. Some women are so gay but are not conscious of it. If only one person triggered these feelings within them, they would succumb like nothing else and, for the first time, get to experience what desire is; what it feels like and what love making is. Then you have those who are aware but are just too afraid of crossing the border because they are afraid of the judgement they shall receive from society.

The sad reality is that most women, particularly in African culture, do not even know what orgasm is. They are deprived of the sensational pleasure of love making. All they ever get is raw sex. That selfish dominant interaction driven by ruthless patriarchy, where sex is nothing but a penis and a vagina together and the primary role is of the penis to enter the vagina and just start shoving and humping! There are no emotions. The sensual connection from the women is never ignited. She can feel the penis, but it gives her no pleasure while the man feels on top of the world. He is in control ... travelling solo on this poor woman's body ... until he comes! And they make seven kids together while still the woman does not know what orgasm is. She does not know how wonderful it is to be touched, felt and caressed, whispered to in the heat of passion. This is the reality of most women in the larger scope of society across races.

But anyway, that is another chapter, thought Mandy. It is so hard to disentangle all these aspects when you are an intellectual. They always converge in conversation and thought. Mandy could never strip herself of progressive thinking. It formed the greatest part of who she was.

And she was absolutely thrilled that she was not Sihle's 'first'! The Universe knew she had had enough of these encounters. It was a fact that most Mandy's sexual encounters always revolved around women who had never been with a woman before. This, of course could be attributed to her 'hotness'. Giggles. Both women and men found her attractive. She had never battled to bed a woman and men had battled to bed her.

So Sihle had already 'come out.' ... a practice Mandy did not promote in the homosexual community. Readers may differ. A person only comes out *once* in their life and that is through their mother's womb. There is absolutely no need for anybody to come out again simply to comply with or satisfy society's expectations. Society demands a lot from everyone in various ways. Hence, she will never 'come out.' As a matter of fact, she did not even discuss her sexuality with people. They could see or speculate that she was gay, but they never received any 'confirmation' from her. This was one of the reasons people at her office were so curious about her. They always wanted to know but they never got a direct answer. She always told them where to get off, politely. Smiles.

"It was so lovely meeting you ngane yami. I am very happy that you've made my child so happy," Mandy's heart melted when Sihle's mother uttered those words.

"Kubonga mina mah. Thank you very much for making me feel so welcome and the meal was just delicious." Mandy knew she could use 'big' words like 'delicious'. Sihle's mom was an accomplished woman. A professor at Wits university in the field of humanities, she was an activist, and she sat on various boards. She was even on TV now and then. Mandy felt humbled to be in her presence but grateful to be so warmly accepted by her. She wanted to be like her when she grew up! Sihle's family had prepared a wonderful meal of mutton, steam bread and veggies - and the veggies were Mandy's favourites: spinach and butternut. She had

a feeling Sihle had something to do with this. She might have asked her sister (at a price of course) to make the dinner because she knew what her lover loved. And she could not wait to tell her later that she nailed it and to kiss her from head to toe for it. The spinach was superb. Mandy loved creamed spinach, and this one was made with some heavenly cream. For now, let us call it love. Mandy needed to eat the greens because she was anaemic, doctor's recommendations, so anything green and this delicious was a bonus. She had felt at home at the dinner table at Sihle's place. Of course, it was also advantageous that there was wine. One never goes wrong when wine is present. No whines with wine, Mandy always states.

Ayabonga, Sihle's younger sister, was the one who had prepared the meal. Mandy and she hit it off immediately. She was such a bubbly, mad soul. Just like her sister. She was doing her final year in BCom Accounting. Yes, at Wits, which made sense, who would not want to take advantage of a 100% fee discount because her mother was at the university. Ayabonga was also a very humble, disciplined child and she chose staying home over moving out in pursuit of freedom. She defied the rebels...an extremely obedient child. Sihle's only sibling. Mandy understood though, because Sihle was just as humble...akaphaphi. A well contained strong young woman. *How did I manage to be this lucky? Especially in Jozi where everyone always has a hidden agenda?* Mandy thought, feeling grateful that this gorgeous woman chose her out of everyone else. Fact: Sihle was in high demand because of her beauty so for her to have chosen Mandy was just ... yeah. Of course, not to say Mandy did not know that she was also a catch, but she appreciated the compliment of having Sihle in her life.

There are nine million bicycles in Beijing.

That's a fact.

Like the fact that I will love you till I die. She was reminded of that Katie Melua song.

In all these nine million people, so to speak, she had chosen her, and it was a fact that she would love her until she died...as they say, 'till death do us part'. And she could not wait for the day they would make that commitment to each other. She knew Sihle was the only person she was born to make that covenant with.

"Hello, my beautiful lover," Mandy answered the call.

"I would like to invite you for lunch baby ... how I wish I could eat you though, but your company shall do for now," said Sihle in that low, sexy voice.

"Ncooh...thank you my heart. I was actually starving and thinking what I am going to have ... you know how I don't like canteen food ... didn't pack lunch this morning, woke up late."

"You what? Mmh hh and who kept you late little madam."

"Hahahaha ... haybo, as for little madam, really baby? Do not worry, I don't believe in polygamy. I had lots of work to do. I had to catalogue some extra stuff."

"Of course, I know my love. You are captured ... I can't wait to see you."

“I love you and I love the way I love you.”

“Ncooh, korobela yam yaspana baby!” They burst into laughter.

“You didn’t even have to use it lover.”

“Mine is natural, my love.”

She could not wait to see her queen. It had been a cold rainy night sleeping all alone. Sihle had work to do out of town. Mandy was no longer used to sleeping without her, even worse, on rainy nights. She missed those loving arms, her skin, her rhythm of breath, her hands, damn, just her presence. They were the typical social media #LoveLivesHere...and to think, she used to mock and diss such posts!

Chapter Six

Mandy had been so thrilled that Tuesday afternoon when she received a call from her childhood neighbour, Luthando. What an awesome story this boy had lived. He was the epitome of focus, dedication and evidence of the saying that ‘education is a key to success.’ He had managed to pull himself out of utter dire poverty through education. His story should be narrated as inspiration for a better world.

Of course, his background was not a unique one in this country. He was raised by a ‘single’ mother as it were. Single in the sense that his father was working in the mines. During those days of urbanization, most black family structures were disrupted because Oobaba babe seGoli to phanda the gold, only returning home once a year for Christmas holidays.

The burden this put on the women has always been overlooked by the system and patriarchy. The woman is both father and mother, responsible for everything ... cooking, cleaning, washing, working the land and protecting the children. These women never rest at all. Their day never ends. Unlike in the ideal regular 9 to 5, where one knows at 9, they start, at 5 it ends, and there is a very clear portfolio of what functions to do AND get paid for it, these women received no wages or salaries.

But it was both magical and marvellous how they still blossomed in humble circumstances. This is because, it would seem, they never really considered their situation as a misfortune as it was so common. It was the standard setup for most households. Talk about normalising poverty and women abuse. However, Mandy reckoned this was perhaps the right attitude. As the saying goes, ‘ignorance is bliss.’ It was better for them not to be aware that this was abuse, as compared with the fact of possessing this knowledge and letting it devour your soul every single day and night. But once again, one would argue which grown up woman would not realise and see abuse? For now, let us just say, they had a divine mechanism to cope.

They would still laugh up a storm when going together to collect wood or when going to the river to do washing. They had this beautiful practice of always doing laundry in groups, which fascinated Mandy. She had been lucky that in those days, there was a maid doing their laundry. She was not bothered with it. The most laundry she did was washing her school shirt and socks.

For these women, laundry would be like a date! When the weather was sunny on a Saturday, rest assured baya Emfuleni to do laundry.

This was also the time for gossip to circulate. This was when everybody caught up on the news. Those ‘have you heard’ moments. For example, how another woman’s husband had not sent money that month or how so and so’s daughter had been seen walking with some boy. Those days in that environment, it was almost taboo for a girl and a boy to be seen by elders *jolling* in public. There was no celebration of ‘public displays of affection’! Or how some girl had been impregnated by some boy who ‘denied the stomach.’ Yes, boys had and still do have the privilege to say yes or no to a pregnancy.

This was the horrible reality girls had to face and continue to face. It was the biggest and most depressing moment for any girl, ‘ukuphikwa,’ as she could not believe this boy who had

begged her to open her legs was now saying it was not him and that would be the end of the story.

The shame and embarrassment that would befall the maternal side was unbearable. It would be a sharpening pain to the mother as she would have to deal with this alone because the father useGoli! No mother wants to see her pregnant teenager in tears because the boy umphikile and his parents called her names for accusing their son. They would call the young pregnant teenager a whore that needs to go search for the actual father because she had been clearly sleeping around. These moments would get so bad, close to escalating to physical violence, as they would be pushed and thrown out of the boy's house.

You did have the self-conscious, loving, caring and honest boys who would take responsibility and knew that they would be the one to suffer the consequences with their parents after admitting that they did sleep with the girl. It would be a moment of victory for the maternal side as there would not be the usual shame.

This was also a sign of true love for the boy, they would say, 'ulucky sana ... uyakuthanda lomfana' because he was at liberty to deny but said yes. And in most of these good stories, the two would end up eventually getting married. It was very rare that a boy would admit and then eventually break up with the girl. It did happen in some cases, and this would cause great animosity between his new lover and former baby mama because the baby mama would feel entitled ukuthi she was like the wife because she was given izinkomo for isisu. She would not realise the fact that the cattle were for the acknowledgement of the pregnancy not a lobola.

And as patriarchy would have it, the pressure to want to eventually marry this boy emanated from the fact that a girl with a child was considered damaged goods! Who wants to marry a woman with a child? The way it works is that men want sex from women, but they want to marry virgins. So how were women supposed to be both virgins while also giving them sex was a mysterious expectation to Mandy.

The other aspect which continued to be a mystery to Mandy was that it was the responsibility of the women to report isisu to the boy's house, but it was the responsibility of men to negotiate for lobola. It is as if patriarchy has chosen the easier option for the men. It was the women who must be embarrassed ukubika isisu, while the men must be hailed when all is assured and confirmed under lobola negotiations.

It needs no mention that these women never lacked a topic or ran out of gossip on laundry day. They would take the whole day by the river. This was because the laundry would also be 'hung' there! Creative women. They would spread the laundry on the grass, and it is amazing how it worked so perfectly, a natural science. So, when they returned from the river, it would all be dry.

Luthando was part of this mess. His father worked eGoli. They lived in poverty as he never sent enough money and some months, he sent nothing at all. One wondered where the audacity stemmed from, for some of these men! How do you not send money home for two months? *What do you think your children are eating?* Mandy would think, heartbroken. And

of course, it would be the responsibility of the woman to make sure there was food on the table, lights, and sanitary towels for the girls.

Luthando's mother worked for Mandy's granny. She called her Aunty, and they were very close. She would make debt and takeout food from the spaza. So, she also benefited from this relationship. Mandy's granny understood when she did not have the money to pay because she was the one responsible for picking up the cheque from the post box. They used the shop's PO Box. Therefore, this arrangement saved Luthando's mother from explaining a lot of stuff! And granny would give her more food on top of the unpaid debt.

Luthando's mother was also the one always to update granny about the gossip. 'Uthanda izindaba', they would say. She was the news deliverer. Mandy's granny never went anywhere actually. People always came to her. She also enjoyed hearing the gossip and judging the poor. Yes, she was very snobbish, a trait Mandy was very glad, she never inherited. Her granny was in so many ways 'ibhunu elimnyama' as it was referred to at the time.

She was not a horrible person, but she treated the poor differently as she thought they were mentally less capable. Her grandpa was just the opposite. He treated all equally, regarded everybody equally and wanted everybody to work hard. They were a case of 'opposites attract.'

Luthando had other siblings. He was number four out of nine children. Another very common trend during those days. These women would pop kids like they were blowing bubble gum, one bubble a year. This was because they never 'prevented' or used contraceptives, so when the husband returned in December, there would obviously be sexual activities! So, eighty percent of the time, all these women conceived in December. This meant that they were pregnant all year. A woman would feel so grateful at the blessing of not catching, when the husband left. It would be something the women teased themselves and mocked one another about.

Mandy did not want to neglect to mention the violence and abuse which accompanied this damaging practice. Some husbands would beat their wives when they suggested against sex and opted for the 'safe period'. They would beat the hell out of their wives and force them to have sex.

The twisted reasoning behind this, would be either, she was cheating, or she wanted to cheat during the year and that, was the reason she did not want to get pregnant. Some of these insecure men rejoiced that their woman was pregnant all year ... so there was no way of cheating because it was taboo to sleep with another man when you were pregnant by another. Even if you slept with your own husband, it was in hushed tones.

Luthando's mother was a victim of this mentality, hence the soccer team of children. The husband would beat her up if she refused to entertain his sexual advances. He did not want to listen to her plea of saying 'baba, ngicela after sengiye eskathini.' No, he wanted his urges satisfied there and then.

Yet the very same person would then have the cheekiness not to send money to feed the kids he was always ready to make. *Men get away with a lot*, thought Mandy. They are the ones

who always claim the 'hard-worker' title. But the truth is, in most rural remote areas of which constitute the majority in this country, it is the women that carry the burden of maintaining the family. Even though the husband is the one working, a lot of financial burdens are carried through by these women. They take small chores, like washing laundry for someone or weeding their fields or even collecting wood for them. Some would even sell chips and magwinyas just to buy a packet of mealie meal, cabbage, oil and a candle, so that there was dinner that night and a light to cook it.

Luthando, as an education success story, had decided to focus on his books and ignore the family dysfunctionality rooted in poverty and abuse. He finished his matric with an exemption which afforded him the opportunity to go to a former Bantu university. He became invested in political studies and to cut the story short, he now works for the Department of Foreign Affairs and was currently based in India as an ambassador of something. Please do not judge Mandy on this: of course, she gets politics but only engages with it at an intellectual level. She does not have time to glorify titles and how great it is to be 'overseas.' She just appreciates the fact that the boy managed to escape poverty and now has made a sound decision to marry.

It is a cute love story as he was marrying his varsity sweetheart. Mandy was absolutely thrilled for him ... jubilant, beyond words. The wedding was set to be in Pietermaritzburg aka PMB.

Mandy was both excited and shaken to the core. Come to think of it, she had never actually introduced anyone to her family. Her gayness had never been the topic of discussion at the dinner table. Although everyone in her family bayazi ukuthi udlalela which team, it had never been spoken about openly.

She was very grateful to her older cousin who was a lesbian, married to her partner, and they had a beautiful two-year-old who was conceived through artificial insemination and carried by the partner, which made sense because Mandy's cuz is just 'too much of a boy!'

So, she knew for a fact, she would not be the first one to be 'awkward.' She had had this conversation with her mother, a hard-core Catholic, but her mother had assured her with her own words that it was ok with her. That she loved her as she was, being an only child. However, deep down, Mandy knew she had uttered those words with a belief that it was just a varsity thing ... she was just a second- year student at the time. She thought it was something that would eventually 'disappear' one day. As the popular word is used, 'a phase'. A lot of parents just think gayness is a phase that will phase out like fashion!

Sadly, for her mom, it never disappeared. Instead, it had grown stronger. And now, she had met the love of her life to eternity. Her mom slowly had to come to acceptance, especially after her last hope had failed. She had hoped that Mandy residing with her strict aunt, and attending the seven days church, would have a change in her love life. That she would meet a 'brother' there ... a dream that could not be further from Mandy's heart.

Mandy was hoping her family would be as welcoming as Sihle's family had been to her, even though that had been under a very formal dinner, small and very intimate. Sihle's introduction would be less formal, as her plus one at the wedding, and Mandy would then proceed to mention that, amongst other things, she was the officially designated keeper of her heart. And she wanted to marry her.

The other thing Mandy was certain of was that her family is not a rude family. They would be polite to Sihle even if they did not like her, then deal with Mandy later and privately. But there was absolutely nothing NOT to like, in fact to love, about Sihle. She was just perfect the way she was, not in the strict sense of the word because nobody is perfect. Just like Mandy, so she cannot expect of someone what she cannot be. That is just how life is.

She wondered how she was going to crack the introduction ... should she gather the family members who would be there together or rather introduce her to whomever she got the chance to? She knew most of her close family would be there because they also celebrated Luthando's success as he grew under granny's care and guidance. And they were a family that celebrated education. So, anything that had to do with the glorification of education, Mandy's family would turn up.

As the universe would have it, she had tripped for nothing, Sihle was gracefully welcomed. It was shocking that her aunt had even said, "I am so happy to finally meet a partner of yours. I was beginning to worry that you don't trust us enough to share your feelings and that hurts me." Mandy's heart just melted at these words because she had thought her aunt would be the problematic one. Her aunt taking this route also comforted Mandy's mom, who valued her aunt's opinion. She believed in her choices and decisions, which were correct most of the time, except when coming to her son, the project!

Sihle felt the genuine love that was extended to her.

"Thank you so much babe for letting me meet your family. I love you," she would later convey when driving back to Jozi.

"You most welcome my love," she replied.

The wedding was wonderful. They could not wait for theirs! Giggles.

Chapter Seven

It was as if the universe had decided Mandy should witness both the bad and the good of her friends. After Luthando's success story, she randomly bumped into Mpho. This was very surprising, simply because of the venue.

She had decided to go out one hot Friday night to a popular student bar: it was not a student bar, but students liked going there. She was feeling a bit down after hearing one of her closest loving uncles had been admitted into hospital and was very sick. They had a very special relationship. Her uncle, Tito, adored her. "I love your mind and laughter," he would say. Hence, he would just randomly call after a long time and say, "I just wanna hear that laugh."

The only thing Mandy complained about regarding their loving relationship, was the fact that contact seemed one sided! Because he would change numbers like socks, she never actually had his number. As a matter of fact, they would be saved as 'Tito latest 7' for example. So, when Mandy needed to talk to him because she missed him, which was most of the time, it would be voicemail. "Aah Tito, you not being fair mara, mina, when I want you, awutholakali mara you always skwil if you don't get me wena ... be fair malume." She would confront him, trying to sound serious, at which Tito would brush her off with a giggle. "Ufuna ngikuphe malini mshana?" he would joke.

He liked playing big in a small town. He grew up very loaded. He was what they call a spoiled brat ... Mandy's aunt would narrate his story as they grew up in the same era. His late father had been a very successful businessman in Benoni, on the East Rand of Jozi, during those years of apartheid. He owned about five shops in the Kasi. They had a huge house, about seven bedrooms alone!

Tito represented one of the few black kids who had a car at university. And he went to the university Durban -Westville, and that time, going there was a big deal. That university had a big fancy reputation, especially with people from Jozi. They were blown away by the idea of the sea. And he was to study BCom Accounting, following in the footsteps of his father. But he never made it. He became the typical spoiled brat ... just partying throughout the year as he could afford it. He flunked first year, and his parents said he must repeat. They had the money. Well, let us just say, after three years, he acquired the status of 'a university drop out'!

He still lived big in ekasi and decided to be a Gintsa! Now, those days, being a thug with money was not a common thing. Most thugs got into the game because of poverty and scarcity. So, when you had money and decided to be a thug, you earned respect. Because his family was well known for being rich, he capitalized on that and got tender deals in the black market. Therefore, for the longest time, he was bowling with cash, fancy cars and of course the women. Especially because, as the cherry on top, he was also handsome. One never knew what Tito was doing, all one knew was that 'it's business' and he would refer to himself as a businessman.

He tried to be responsible and got married to the hottest girl in ekasi to be amaboys' envy. They had two kids. However, with the fast life and cheating, it ended up not working. They eventually divorced.

Anyway, that was why Mandy was now at this bar, trying to digest and accept the fact that her beloved uncle was dying. She had seen his state and knew it would be a miracle if he came back from the hospital. But she also knew that he did not want to come back either. He was ready to go. Mandy had the feeling that he wanted to leave behind that memory of the great cool Tito. He did not want people to remember him as a 'loser' who once had it all *and* lost it all.

Mandy thought there was going to be another family gathering over the funeral, but also the costs. She was trying to recall if she had put him in some cover or not because if not, she was going to have to raise a 5000 thousand rands contribution in cash! She was reminded of a call centre agent, who had the best sales. He was a top performer, selling funeral cover for this company. And his line was always simple, "we know death is painful, we cry but we don't want to cry because we don't know how to bury the person! We want to cry because we have lost a loved one ... so mama, this cover will do exactly that for you. It will give you tears of joy." Mandy burst into laughter when thinking about this guy. And it always worked. He was magic by the dialler!

Mandy was not bothered about finances: she would do anything to make sure the funeral went smoothly. She just needed to check the paperwork. *Relax Mandy, he ain't dead yet* she consoled herself, and left that thought hanging when she spotted Mpho.

She was sitting at the bar alone as Sihle was out of town with work. She really missed her and that was another reason she had come out. She did not want to be all miserable and gloomy at home. Rather go to the bar and get distracted with all the drama and watch other people's lives and, more importantly, listen! Yes, the music was a major driver behind this.

"Mpho, are my eyes failing me, WTF."

"Mandy, what a lovely surprise ... how are you," Mpho responded.

"I am good thanks, weird to see you here," she said, staring at the glass in his hand. They both laughed as he read in between the lines.

"Yes, I know. Its life, I guess ... things change bra ... life is about turns."

"And the turn took you to the bar?" Mutual laughter.

"You still got your sassy jokes, Mandy. What can I say, I guess my turn got delayed?"

"Hahahahahaha very funny ... so now, you're on my case? Nice come back ma boyie."

They hugged.

Mpho's story came as a shock to Mandy. Mpho had been one of those very good boys. He never drank or partied or liked women. He became Christian at varsity in the charismatic church, wayesindisiwe, as they refer to the born again. He attended the Assemblies of God church. This was where they had initially met. He was also very much involved in the church;

you know those ushers and the people one goes to when they are new at church? Yes, Mpho was that guy. Very committed to the church.

Now, before you wonder or judge, let us get clarity. As mentioned, Mandy was also Christian so in her second year at varsity she attended the same church. However, in her third year, she sorts of ‘fell’ and focused more on the street club life! *It is very hard for one to balance the two*, she thought, laughing. This was because, when you party on Friday and Saturday, Sunday became the day of recovery, not church! It got worse sometimes, the party carried on into Sunday! Then you got your first three days of the week messed up! “OMG, why did we torture ourselves so much at varsity? We were not kind to us, shame.” They would laugh as friends when reminiscing down the memory lane of varsity however, they would not change a thing if presented with the opportunity.

They were not the biggest of party animals. But they certainly made their mark when in the mood. So, she had to disengage from church for a while. And she was avoiding those emotions of guilt. When the pastor preaches on ‘double lives’ ... on students who go out and party and Sunday they are at church: the pastor would evoke the “God can see you” scenario. *You do not need this Mandy*; she had decided when she took a break. The self-guilt became so dominant, she would almost get paranoid. She would look around to see if someone had seen her in the club.

Mandy’s biggest consolation and reasoning had been, *if you saw me there, it also means you were there ... so we both were not supposed to be there ... therefore, you cannot judge me*. And as it were, there would always be faces she had seen in the club on Friday or Saturday at church! Giggles. Anyway, as they say, only God can judge.

Mpho was not the guy to see in the club. He had married very early, got blessed with two daughters. Life was good for him. He had a nice job with a big company, driving a Merc. She never knew or saw his place of residence, but she was certain, it must have been some nice apartment or even a house, which he had *bought*. Mpho did not come across as that guy who would drive a fancy Merc while renting and not having bought. Also, his level of commitment to the church would have instilled some financial education, which is imperative in one’s life. When financial knowledge is instilled in the early stages of one’s life, it makes a lot of difference. You avoid the ‘borrow from Tom to pay Paul’ trail: for example, Mandy would say. Mandy believed financial education, just like sex education, needs to be instilled. We need a lot of financial education, particularly in this dominant culture of consumerism and soft life. “Ok, go be a motivational speaker then Mandy,” her friends would tease her when she got plugged into her preaching.

Mpho’s wife had recently passed on. Her family was blaming him for her death, insinuating insurance motives. They had taken the children away. He did not look in the best of healthy states either and he was heavily intoxicated with these ‘skimpy’ girls. You know those girls who go to the club with zero cents but expect to drink the most expensive alcohol? Yes, those girls. To Mandy, it seemed everything had just happened way too fast for Mpho.

It was just six months ago that she had seen him with his wife and kids. His wife had never been the ‘cleanest’ if there is such a thing. She always looked clumsy. Mandy had never seen

her 'dressed up' or even 'looking nice.' She always looked dirty with uncombed hair. *If this is the natural look of things, she has abused the basics*, Mandy would reckon every time she met them. The only kind of sickness Mandy would have associated with the wife would be related to mental health because she did not understand how a 'normal' person would carry herself the way she did. Mpho was the opposite. He always looked smart and neat.

She was not a judgmental person. Yes, it might have been way too soon for him to be busy jolling already with girls and not mourning the death of his wife. But maybe, this was his way of dealing with the pain and loss of his entire family. If the accusations of killing his wife were false, imagine not having the family support you require to grieve your loss, instead be held responsible for the loss, and as if that were not torturous enough, they take away the very last remaining thing you shared with your partner. *That must be devastating, it would lead anyone to self-destruction which includes whoring and drinking*, Mandy thought, feeling sad for this guy.

It was life, wasn't it? She closed that mirror in her head.

Chapter Eight

She was seated on a table with a perfect view of the dance floor, sipping on a Martini. It was varsity days. Crazy stuff days. Days of dodging the bullet. That night, she had decided to be a bit 'mature' ... to distinguish herself from the students who were busy gulping on the cheap box wine that was on special! And you could just imagine how sauced they looked. She burst into laughter. There is something about wine that gets you super drunk very fast when consumed under pressure. The students had limited cash and the special had a cut off. So, they wanted to make certain by the time bathi 'special over', they were ironed and wined properly. Mandy knew these strategies very well.

She had been there. Ladies Night. From six pm to nine pm. Admission free for ladies. Free wine for ladies. They never missed this moment if they had plans of going out that Wednesday. They knew exactly where their location had to be at 5:50! They would be in the queue already. Arriving on time was critical because the pub could only accommodate a certain number of ladies. Come nine o'clock, the free wine was over. There were no ladies left. Mandy had never been a believer in the 'guys will buy you drinks' vibes. Maybe, this was because she was not attracted to them, therefore she saw no reason for them to buy her drinks as she was not going to sleep with them! This 'gentlemanly' behaviour was a transaction in most cases ... a tit for tat. However, for some reason, guys still offered her drinks. But it was more special when it was a girl who offers! That aroused some intense excitement in her body and that naughty hope of 'what if she's macking on me.' She would smile silently, feeling like an achiever already.

She sat there enjoying the beat. The DJ was on fire. Most of the students that had rocked up there were in miniskirts, top crops *and* empty wallets. The group of girls that went there and just waited to be 'halla'd at.' Mandy found this to be a risky game. A lot of men still believe that a drink is an exchange for sex. *Are these young girls fuelling this ill practice or will they scream human rights when shit hits the fan?* Mandy wondered.

But in the court of law, they still had a valid leg to stand on, simply because they did not force the guys to give them the drinks and more importantly, there was never an initial verbal or written agreement that 'I shall buy you drinks, and you go home with me' utterances. This transaction happened under assumption.

You did have those girls who are more than willing to give it up, sort of speak. As a matter of fact, they would go out with the intention of getting laid. The drinks just become a bonus as their primary mission is to get a fuck. These types of girls mean business and are the ones that demand and expect expensive alcohol. Their other trait is that they do not usually hook up with other students. They would go for the blesser scenario and give men a run for their money. They embodied the 'last man standing' vibes when it comes to the credit card. They were not scared of deserting guy A and joining guy B if guy A had run out of money.

"Anywhooo, each to his own," as the famous saying stated.

Mandy also observed the rise of obesity in this generation - by no means with intent to judge or body shame. It was just funny to her how the so called 'ma2k' are generally fat! Most of

them looked way older than their age. “I mean guys, it’s like we look younger than them,” they would joke with her friends after having had a few. “What are they eating? Are they not exercising? The concept of gym is alien to them?” she would wonder with concern.

The other conclusion she had arrived at with regards to this fatness, though she had never shared it with anyone except her lover, Sihle, was that, particularly for the young girls, was contraceptives. She had heard stories and read that sometimes the injection or pill makes one put on weight. We live in a society that encourages most young girls to be on some form of contraceptives ... which in turn makes them fat. For example, a sixteen-year-old would have a big hanging stomach like she has already given birth to six children!

Mandy’s other ‘great’ reflection on ‘ama2k’ was that most of them *already* had kids. She had jokingly made a decision with her friends; “mfethu mina, I don’t even ask, do you have kids ... I go, how many kids do you have?” at which they would all crack a storm. But this was on a serious note. She did that and got a breath of fresh air at the few ‘I don’t have’ responses. Ok. Granted, she had not conducted formal research, but approximately 1 in 4 students had a child based on her database.

It also became somehow contradictory to Mandy that these are the very same people who were so concerned with spending money on nails and weaves and make up. *It is not like they are depressed and have given up on life in terms of being*, she would debate internally. They still wanted to look good. They did take care of their weaves and nails ... didn’t they think the body also needed to be taken care of? That it also needed maintenance, so to speak. It was not maintained by stuffing it with food, especially junk food. Besides, it was also just a matter of keeping healthy and not even about the pursuit of being a size 26! That mandate is for Hollywood stars.

Perhaps, this was a deep-rooted personal fear of Mandy that was now extending or being projected externally. She was afraid of being fat. She always tried her best to make sure she walked as much as she could because, at that point in her life, she did not have time to go to the gym. “It’s funny how I used to mock people in disbelief who said, they didn’t have time for gym,” she recalled, with her tail in-between legs. But now, she clearly understood. Sometimes, the time just was not there!

Two other girls, who had come to sit very close to her, were chatting. She could not help but be exposed to the conversation.

“So chomi, this girl uthole this guy from Tinder. Cute guy, the works. They finally arrange a date. The handsome guy is such a gentleman. He pulls the chair out for her and he removes the coat. They have a lovely time at some top-class restaurant in Sandton. He pays for the expensive bill and later akhokhele her uber as well. Over the next day, hay, the bisto is growing chomi, they are chatting non-stop, and u gal feels like she is catching ama feelings manje. This guy is such a gentleman ... third day after the expensive dinner, u guy athi, since I took you out last time, how about I come to your place next time? Of course, avume u gal. The funny thing is that ugal does not like cooking for men. She never does but for some reason, this one, she cannot wait to cook for him. She does not want to lose on a catch because she is being miss independent yena! Cook for the man chomi! It so happens that, she

must quickly go to the shop to get just one ingredient for the meal. The guy insists on being left behind, he is just gonna chill on the couch and watch soccer. The girl sees no harm in that. After returning from the shop, the guy is not on the couch, she thinks, maybe he has gone to the bathroom. She knocks, dololo...checks bedroom, dololo ... checks outside because she stays on ground floor ... guy dololo! He is nowhere to be found. Only when she returns from outside, does she notice, the TV is gone ... her laptop AND her sister's laptop are gone ... her phone is also gone! She quickly rushes to the two men that she saw standing to ask if they had seen the guy. They like, yes, we saw him carrying a small plasma and two laptops! At the sound of that confirmation, she nearly fainted right there and then. It dawns on her that she has no concrete contact information of this guy. When she goes on Tinder, the account has been deactivated.”

The girls were laughing up a storm. Mandy could not help but laugh as well, though there was nothing funny about the story at all. Then, they went on about how Tinder had become a platform utilised by some creeps. The stories one saw on Tik Tok were shocking. This is because everyone is on some deep search to find love and the scammers are ready to take advantage of that vulnerability. It is mostly women that get scammed when it comes to matters of the heart.

Mandy switched back her concentration to the dance floor. It had just suddenly picked up. There were these two girls who were tuned in proper, like a guitar. Mandy enjoyed watching a beautiful woman dance. “The only magic in dancing is just possessing confidence...move like you know what you are doing,” she would advise her friends when arguing over who was a ‘good dancer and bad dancer.’ Obviously, there are levels. If it is a formal dance competition and there is a prize, then you can judge ‘good dancer vs bad dancer.’ But on a social media platform, that analogy does not apply. People like to deprive themselves of life’s simple pleasures ... imagine someone not being able to dance to their favourite song because, apparently, they cannot dance! “You are going to do and enjoy very little in this world if you await external validation concerning your being,” she would seriously advise her friends with that, jokes aside, tone.

Mandy caught eyes with one of the women dancing. The lady in red, which made her think of that classic song. They shared a smile. Mandy saw exactly who she was. She was the enticer. Those beautiful women who were ‘no fucks bitch.’ They lure you in with their looks and smooth dance moves but would not go home with you. They feed off the attention they receive from people who cannot read through them and think they perhaps stand a chance.

Of course, Mandy was a ‘one woman, one woman’ woman! She was fully committed to her lover and she did not even have the slightest craving for any other woman. In fact, ever since meeting Sihle, she had not looked or checked out any other girls. As they say, ‘why go looking for fish when you got steak at home.’ Sihle was her everything.

She immediately turned her focus away from the lady in red. She did not want to entertain her silliness. She was not going to be her victim. And besides Mandy detested those ‘straight’ girls who always thought, ‘oops am so hot and all, lesbians want me because lesbians want every girl’ mentality. It is not true that just because a person is attracted to women, therefore,

all women! It may have been true in the case of straight men! So, whenever a woman projected those energies, no matter how beautiful she was, Mandy automatically switched her off.

And some of these ‘straight’ girls even felt entitled to touch a lesbian in a sexual manner, as and when they please. And this is never considered sexual harassment. Like you have no right touching my boobs and telling me that you are curious about how it feels. And then when lesbians return the favour and randomly touch girls, it becomes a big deal. They feel offended and uncomfortable because they are ‘straight.’ *The nerve of heterosexuals is unbelievable at times, even women are guilty*, Mandy would reckon. *Let us just all have mutual respect.*

This behaviour was even more disgusting when exerted by a man! Those guys who ‘jokingly’ touched lesbians on some ‘come on girl, don’t you wanna know how it feels like to be touched by a man? I can show you and make you feel nice you know’ mentality. Of course, Mandy would see these men do that to other lesbians. “NO chop would dare do that to me.” She was adamant. She did not play like that. She treasured her space and privacy and, nobody could be over familiar in their interaction with her if she did not know them. And this was not even meant in a malicious way - it was simply to avoid being caressed by chops.

Her mind came to a still. She realized how much she was missing Sihle. It was always the case when in love, the more the drink sinks in, the greater the hollow created if your love is not around. She dreaded the thought of her cold empty bed all alone. She had become very used to sleeping next to Sihle every night. The pleasure of waking up randomly turning and feeling her soft warm body. That beautiful sight in the morning when she opened her eyes, and they land on her. That beautiful angelic heavenly voice that went, “good morning baby” ... it always sounded even better than the “good night baby.” She wondered what she was doing. It had been three hours since they spoke. Not that she was counting! Giggles.

She missed Sihle so much. She wanted to call her or chat. You know, jealousy is a normal feeling if it is moderated. Mandy believed Sihle’s jealousy was moderate. It was not the extreme out of context one or even the dangerous one. Sihle was not an insecure woman, just that she loved to protect what belonged to her. And Mandy belonged to her.

There would be times when she would ask for her phone, just to ‘touch’ it! She would be like “baby please give me your phone.” Mandy would tease in response, “No, what do you wanna check?” as she peacefully handed over the phone. She had nothing to hide. She had committed to be here in her arms for a lifetime. It was funny because, Mandy thought, the only person who could ever mess up their union, would be her and she thought the same! Talk about miscommunication.

Mandy had always been a natural flirt even with zero intentions. Women just loved her... men also ... boring for the latter! Sometimes, it was just innocent. She was a person with a sense of humour, which did not help. Some girls would read intentions too deep in her jokes.

Yes, granted, she was no angel ... there had been times when she fully embraced that offering from the universe and bedded one or two women. But now she was in a committed relationship and she either wanted or desired anyone else but Sihle.

As she was busy dissolving in the emptiness of her lover, she felt a tap on her shoulder. “Hi, you look so serious deep in thought, are you ok?” the voice said. There was something so soft and gentle about the hand on her shoulder ... as she turned her head, she figured this was the lady in red from that dance floor! Mandy locked a bit. She did not know how or what to say. Her best shot was to keep it together. “Hahaha, what do you mean?” She responded projecting confidence. “I saw you checking me out and for the first time, I responded, genuinely to it ... I don’t normally do that ... but there’s just this vibe am feeling with you ... dayme, you soo hot! What’s your name if I may ask?” she uttered in that tender voice; her lips so close to Mandy’s ear. She could feel the pace of her breath.

In her head, Mandy was thinking, ‘keep calm Mandy...don’t you dare. Relax.’ “Nchoo, thank you very much. You look beautiful as well. What is your name?” she replied ... This woman was so mannered. She was different from the box Mandy had put her in, the ‘oh just because you so hot, you must be highly wanted.’ box. She had clearly misjudged her.

Without Mandy’s acknowledgement or consent, she ordered two tequilas. “Please, let’s have these.” Mandy could not say no. The gesture exerted a type of energy she could not resist. It was like when your favourite teacher tells you to do homework and you know, you must do it! Even though you do not understand why. But because they are your favourite teacher, you will gladly do it.

The lady in red wore an inviting scent. It was an intoxicating cologne. The one that follows you ... the one that you want to suck! She was so close to Mandy and she kept squeezing closer. Dayme, she had Mandy exactly where she wanted her ... lost in translation ... trying to win against this red tide and swim back to her lover, Sihle! “I really want us to go home together, do you mind if we do?” What a direct simple statement of a request! Mandy locked against the arms that were caressing her back, gently lulling her limbs into jelly. Red alarms were going off, but Mandy hit the snooze button.

Yes, granted, this woman was acting over- familiar, but in that moment, Mandy did not really mind the over-familiarity especially because of the void left by her lover. She gazed deep in the Lady in Red’s eyes before she gave her response...

Chapter Nine

In the days Sihle was away, Mandy found herself thinking about love. She would sit around their apartment and see traces of Sihle everywhere. The whole space was transformed. The couch was no longer just a couch, but the place they kissed and snuggled. The books were fragments of shared conversations. The bathroom was Sihle's naked skin glistening with water. Many walked through these traces and wondered about love and absence ... how love is a thing that remains even after the person is gone. She thought about how the word love is so small to contain all the things that fit into it. Lost love and loves, physical love - carnality and the love of bodies and pleasure. And then she thought about how big love is, how all-consuming and how it had swallowed her up like the fish that swallowed Jonah from the Bible. And then all the small loves, the moments of affection, and confusion that define so much of life in the in general.

Case in point: was the woman who worked at the varsity canteen Mandy frequented as a student. She was friendly, professional and warm and lovely in a way that made every customer feel special. Those people that you wish more for. That you think, one day they are going to be in a better work environment, because they display such a work ethic and such commitment to the little responsibility their current position entrusts in them. What was more, she was always so warm and affectionate to Mandy. One instance stayed with Mandy. She did not know why, it remained a small funny memory. It was Wednesday and Mandy was in the canteen queue with her classmate. They were discussing 'drafts.' "I certainly don't like the idea of a draft," said Mandy "It's just too much work". She went on substantiating her dislike. "Because the problem is, if the assignment is due on the thirtieth, you want the draft on the twentieth, then that means, I must have done the work by the twentieth! So, in essence, this thing is due on the twentieth! ". "Exactly my friend, some of us are last minute people ... we want to start the assignment on the twenty-fifth", her mate responded in affirmation.

The canteen lady could read the frustration on Mandy's face and hear it in her voice. "Sorry to ask but what is a draft?" It was not the question itself but rather the manner and tone of deep concern in her voice that touched Mandy deeply ... for a moment, she was locked. She did not know how to explain what a draft was to this lady. She tried her best to explain and the lady smiled and said, "Oh thank you. I have learnt something new".

She later thought about how funny it is, how we take things for granted. She realized the huge gulf that existed between this woman and the students she served. Here they were worrying about things like drafts and deadlines: these were small things compared to poverty and hunger. In this woman's world deadlines, were the slow queues outside social security that did not move for days. Drafts were draughts - the tall beers people drink to get sauced. She wondered which world was perhaps best: to live in a world that knows what a draft is or a world that does not know what a draft is. Then she thought about the love of a country. And the disturbed love that citizens continue to feel for the ruling party. A haunted love where the fundamentals of what they love has gone away but the love still stays. Mandy surmised this is due to the ugly history of the country. The liberation movement was the first to bring freedom to the people, affording them an opportunity to be regarded as human beings who have rights.

They were so grateful to vote in the first democratic election and to have one of the greatest constitutions on paper that they did not notice that the values of what they loved had slowly been eroded. And of course, like so many, loves gone wrong scenarios at the beginning, great promises were made, assuring a better life for all through reconciliation.

However, it would seem, human nature took over the leaders of the ruling party. The levels of corruption have escalated beyond the imaginary. They have completely deserted the initial promise. The living conditions of the majority are depreciating daily. The cost of living is rising together with high levels of unemployment. And every project designed to alleviate the suffering of the poor, seems to be a platform to squander money. Just the other day, Mandy had been tuned into the radio for her current affairs update and they were going on about how the ‘food basket’ had increased.

“So how are these people supposed to have bread on the table when the government is in cahoots with the system to sabotage basic access to something like food?” Mandy would be infuriated when such thoughts arose. “There seems to be a direct attack on the needs of the poor and women in general, of course thanks to patriarchy. For example, why the heck are sanitary towels so expensive when they are an absolute necessity to women? So many young girls must miss school when on their periods simply because the parents cannot afford sanitary towels! “These should be supplied by the government in schools just like they supply food,” Mandy reckoned. But because it does not affect the boys or the men, it was neither a matter here nor there. It does not help that the parliament is full of old men who have long passed the stage of retirement. So, this does not affect them. And worse, also full of old women way past retirement ... who probably no longer recall what it feels like to be on your period.

The government has no problem telling us, ‘Ok, listen folks, we are going to cut electricity from this time to this time ok. And oh, the water also, you are not going to have for two days or a week or two weeks, depending on where you reside. Deal!’ And that became final. So many businesses had been shut down due to load shedding. So many people completely lost incomes while others suffered severe cuts in pay due to hours that they must work. Of course, this did not affect government employees, only the private sector because government employees still received their full salaries, and they went home early if there was no water! Amid the above, the ruling party remains in power. It would seem, it is love in confusion because the people continue to vote for the same government. “Is it because they don’t know better or are afraid of the unknown?” Mandy would wonder. As the saying goes, better the devil you know. These were imperative aspects of who Mandy was of which she could not stand *not* sharing.

When Sihle finally walked through the door, Mandy was so lost in these thoughts that they did not jump straight into bed as she had imagined they would. By now you know that the

only thing that can get Mandy more heated than sex, was politics. So, the lovers found themselves analysing the state of things.

Sihle related the situation in the Kasi of Thokoza, where she had been visiting her sick aunt. Kasi life was hard, thought Mandy. Do not be fooled by the whole 'romanticism' of that life. There was nothing glorious about Kasi life. The majority of Kasis anyway. Of course, there were a few people that had made it to upper middle class. The people who chose not to exit the Kasi and remained there while being 'successful' and building their double-storeyed houses.

Sihle narrated the sense of hopelessness that surrounded Thokoza. The levels of the concept of 'self-driven' were minimal. And this was not an analysis coming from that misguided ivory tower perception of 'oh blacks are lazy'. This was a predicament. "How do you try rise up when all the odds are set against your rising?" Mandy argued. There was nothing motivating in your vicinity. You remain surrounded by lack and poverty which in turn is culminated into high levels of alcohol consumption. "Those people drink babe," Sihle alerted. "They call it ukuqabula ... like at six am in the morning when bevuka, somebody says, siyaqabula? It is ridiculous. And of course, it did not help that, there was always some house, two houses away that sold. They did not wait for nine o'clock for the bottle store to open."

The people who were fortunate enough to have some sort of employment, as they went to work, they passed by these *blomming* outside already having a drink. Sometimes, it was a congregation of five people over one beer! And of course, the children going to school were also exposed to this unbecoming reality. "And now with the popular idea of these cheap 5litre wines, you can forget babe ... before that beer is finished ... a plan B has already been arrived at ... they gazat for that cheap 120 rands box of wine ... most of the time on credit of which they must pay double the amount when taken on credit," Sihle explained.

You could just imagine the recipe for disaster that was being brewed here. By midday, these people were already overly intoxicated because they never even ate breakfast. "And the crowd has grown by now as the other people passing by come join in ... they drink also, by so doing have committed self to organizing the next 5 litres ... hell shall break loose should they not." They both burst into laughter at this statement even though there was nothing funny about it.

This meant, they would not run out of wine for the longest time. You were just going to have a situation of the first initial group eventually passing out at some point, being replaced by the crowd that came at 11 for example. This routine, what did it mean financially? It meant, when they got piece jobs, that little money had to go towards the double debt of the wine. It meant when they got the grant for either disability or old age or the 350, it went towards that debt ... because these groups were very mixed. It was the old, the young and the middle-aged. Amid all that sadness, there seemed to be love in confusion amongst these people. They declared so much love for one another and assured each other how 'tight' they were...how nothing could ever come between them. This was also the time; they all related their frustrations about the government and discussed every little complaint and injustice against the sun! When they were hammered. These would become very unproductive conversations

because a solution was never discussed. It was just a matter of pointing out what was wrong and how the government did not care for them. And then, that deadly Kasi mentality kicked in! The one, of glorifying the dire poverty they lived in.

They assured one another how strong they were and how Kasi life was the best. They started trashing those who lived in town. They would say things like, how boring it was to live in town because it was very quiet. There was no life there! 'Life' is in the township. Mandy supposed these were stances arising from a deep self-denial. Because, they knew, it was a very long shot for them to find themselves residing in town, so best pretend like they did not want that life. Instead of perhaps trying to devise means and know they absolutely possess what it took to be there. And it was not even a matter of being in town per se but a matter of access to better living conditions. If that could be achieved in the Kasi, then let them do it there. Bring the town to Kasi, so to speak.

Another sad by-product of that routine was that the children who were coming back from school would find no food in the house, just very drunk parents. They would fend for themselves in terms of what to eat. If they had good neighbours, they could go there to linger until offered something to eat. It became a serious problem for the young girl child who was now exposed to being sexually victimized. Yes, the scum bags were also around. The young girl would be hungry, the child molester gave her money to buy a Russian, bread and a refresher...that became heaven to that child. Then she would not utter a word about the private demands made by that guy. Because at that time, she felt she was benefiting and anyway she had no one to talk to about the matter.

The young boychild was going to be tempted to fend for himself by *blomming* near the naughty corner. Of course, we know in Kasi, those boys who have become dropouts and are smoking drugs and robbing people and breaking into houses, not to mention raping. He knew, there was also a bite at some point. The 'grootmans' would send him to the spaza shop to buy some chips. Before you knew it, he was smoking also and he started bunking school until he eventually dropped out and fully *bloms* by the corner, adding to the horrible stats. They call it broken households. These children had no guidance and nobody to monitor them with homework. And how do you even begin to think about homework on an empty stomach? Once again, amid this sadness, its love in confusion for the boy. As the great late Tupac sings in his famous Dear Mama Song, "... even though they sell rock, they showed a young brother love ..." He might as well have substituted love with affection in this line! Giggles.

And what did the parents do with the abundant time at their disposal, besides drinking? You guessed it right. They reproduced! You had a scenario in one mkhukhu, where the single mother had four kids, with the oldest being sixteen with two kids already and the fourteen-year-old with one kid, at that point and pregnant with another. This was not even an exaggeration. It was the situation in Thokoza and many other poor townships. We are not even going to start engaging on the number on ARVs or nevirapine because it was obviously clear there was no protection being used. What was this? Another form of affection in confusion. They loved each other while having unprotected sex.

What was then glorious about that lifestyle? It was shattered, scattered broken dreams.

Mandy was reminded of one of her closest friends who had passed, due to Covid. May her beloved soul rest in peace. She was such a beautiful soul, inside and out. Her name was Lethabo, and she followed exactly in the footsteps of that name. Mandy knew nobody who did not like Lethabo. Well, except for the abusive boyfriend she had. It shattered Mandy's heart seeing the bruises every time this guy came to visit for the weekend. She stayed in res and would sneak him in. Obviously, she could not scream for help when this boy was beating her up because he was not supposed to be there in the first place. She would be in trouble for it.

There was this one time she would never forget.

"Lethabo, I cannot believe this guy burned you with a cigarette," Mandy literally cried at the sight of her wound in her shoulder. She wanted her to bandage it.

"Why why why? Is it because he plays soccer for that famous team?"

"Of course not. You know me better than that. I don't go for titles. At this point, am just scared of leaving him. He says he's going to kill me."

"But how...there is protection on campus, just don't let him in. He is taking advantage of your kindness. Report him to the warden if he comes. He's not a student...he can't be on campus without your consent," Mandy cried out.

"Mandy, it's not as easy as you say ... of course I want out."

This guy was a psychopath. He had anger issues fuelled by an inferiority complex. The truth was, deep down, he could not believe, a beautiful girl like Lethabo would go for a third grade like him. So, he was convinced that she was cheating on him.

"I wish I could leave him baby. But now, I am pregnant."

Mandy could not believe what she had just heard.

"You are pregnant? I don't understand. How far? Didn't you say you stopped sleeping with him?"

"Baby please understand, I didn't want to tell you cause it's embarrassing, and I knew you were going to be mad...he forced himself on me."

"Ohh my love ... I am terribly sorry." They both embraced as tears were streaming down their faces. Mandy had never felt so much hate for anyone before until now. She literally wanted to kill this guy and she knew she would have no regret doing it if she never got caught.

"I haven't even told him. I don't want him to know. But if I delay, he is going to say, I cheated."

"You are still considering the feelings of this monster baby? He should be arrested for what he did ... what he does to you ... look at you, you also have yet another red eye and bruises on your arm. This is evidence." Mandy begged, in pain, trying to convince Lethabo to report this guy.

“What good would it do to have my baby daddy in jail? My child knowing, he or she was born while the father was in prison ... that he’s an abuser?” Lethabo buried herself in Mandy’s chest. Her chest was wet from the tears. It cut Mandy like a sharp knife. She had never felt so powerless about a situation.

It was the worst form of love in confusion because they were also lovers! She was hurting in the capacity of a friend but even more, dire, hurting in the capacity of a lover. Nothing hurts like seeing someone you love being abused and there is nothing you can do about it. What also added to the pain, was that she could not share this with any of their friends. Their love was a secret...it was theirs only. Lethabo found comfort and love from Mandy after being subjected to the abuse whenever the monster came.

She was there by her side at the hospital when she gave birth ... in fact, she called the ambulance. She gave birth to a beautiful baby boy. They would always tease each other years later, that Mandy was the dad! Giggles! She might as well have been. She had vowed to make sure that boy was never in need of anything after his mother had passed from Covid. Mandy believed deep down; the son knew what was going on between the two of them every time Mandy visited. She recalled when she had gone for his ninth birthday in Pretoria.

“You and my mom are so close. You really love each other. I have never seen her so close with any of her other friends. You should visit often.”

It was music to Mandy’s ears ... having the green light from her favourite boy. They had a love that was so unique ... so strong ... could never be publicly shared and she left too soon. Mandy would sometimes wonder; would they have kept the secret forever or at some point went public? Even more, would they eventually have stopped sleeping together? The truth is, even when in relationships, if they found any opportunity to be in each other’s arms, they took full advantage of it. Lethabo was engaged to her boyfriend, when she went as a ‘special guest’ to the ninth birthday, meeting him for the first time. Well, she had no desire to meet the guy obviously ... for obvious reasons but she was happy that he was good to her lover. For that, he deserved some respect.

Or maybe now that Sihle was in the picture, Mandy would have put a stop to it? Because, before, she had not found someone she loved as much as she did Sihle. Maybe she was the one who would have broken the long spell because clearly the fiancé had not managed to do it ... and he was not going to suddenly succeed after he and Lethabo had married. Mandy was the maid of honour! “How unfair the world is,” she had laughed when they had discussed the maid of honour thing.

But what remained a fact now was that she would never have these answers because she was gone. Sometimes, Mandy still dreamt about her. A beautiful bizarre form of love in confusion that ended in a departure of confusion because she did not know why Covid had to take her, out of all people. More unanswered questions remained. “I will always love you Lethabo,” she murmured to herself.

At that very moment, her phone buzzed. “What a weird timing, as if Sihle was sensing her infidelity,” she laughed to self.

“Hello my love. How are you?”

“Why are you so silent? I feel like you getting up to no good.” They burst into laughter.

“Baby you don’t have faith in me?”

“Uhm, you like a naughty toddler, one should be worried when they don’t see you in the vicinity cause, you up to no good where you at.” Another moment of laughter. Of course, Sihle was just joking and missing her lover terribly. Mandy had given her no reason whatsoever to feel some type of way about their love. It was a solid love.

Chapter 10

Mandy stood on the balcony in utter silence, listening to the conversation between the cold breeze, the wind and the small trees. It sounded like a full conversation. She somehow could even hear the words ... a situation equivalent to those who speak in tongues when possessed by the Holy Spirit. It is a language directed and only comprehensible to that individual. This was what happened with Mandy at that very instance. A conversation between her, the wind and the trees on a cold Saturday morning winter.

Hurt was an understatement. She was beyond hurt after spending the entire night drowning in an unstoppable flow of tears ... too many questions, yet very few answers. Perhaps the answers were there, as they are always. It is just difficult to accept them at times when they do not present not the desired outcome. One wants to always abide by the heart's desires.

She wanted to light a cigarette, but she went against the urge! "You've been clean for nine bloody months now Mandy, don't mess it up". She thought, deeply failing to believe this conviction. At that very moment she felt her phone vibrate in her back pocket. Somehow, she knew who the caller was because it was the same caller who had been calling last night and days before. And the same caller she was determined not to answer. This was a decision she had made fighting against every fibre in her body because when it's all said and done, there was a time she would have climbed Kilimanjaro just to hear that voice. She still wanted to hear that voice, but reality commanded otherwise.

She recalled a very informative line she once heard in a movie, now forgetting the title of the movie! They said, 'in life you have to trust no one in that case you trust everyone equally'. She could relate to this on so many levels, situations and interactions. At that very moment she felt betrayed. She felt her genuine trust had gone to waste. She felt her time had gone to waste. And the truth was, she did not know how to move on from here ... how to face just another day, never mind the rest of her life! To be quite honest, she did not see the point in the rest of her life because it had been planned, filled and vested in something and someone who no longer existed in her life. Someone who was no longer a part of her reality but part of every part of her body and heartbeat! "How can I dismantle the two successfully?" She posed this almost impossible question to herself.

She felt those tears, once again streaming down her cheeks. She did not want these emotions of being overwhelmed of which flooded her every time she thought about her current predicament.

The phone rang again and just when she thought she would not pick up, she noticed it was not the same caller but her cuz, Zuko. This was a bit surprising considering it was a Saturday morning and as an Adventist, that time Zuko would be in church! Mandy thought it was a dire emergency, so, she was quick to answer.

“Ola cuz, what’s up? Was the church burnt last night”?

“Ha ha ha you and your jokes cuz ... this one least funny. It bruises God dude! Be careful”. They both burst into laughter.

“I retract the joke. He is the last person I wanna bruise right now cuz. I need ALL of His comfort fam”.

“I know fam and I feel you ... hence my call, am about that comfort cuz. So, my wife and I are making a wonderful lunch and you are invited. We are not taking NO for an answer. We have decided NOT to church today but instead cook for you! You see how special and loved you are”. The warmth and love Mandy felt that very moment cannot be related in words. She felt a different stream of tears coming out. The source being different. It was not from a source of hurt and confusion but of place of warmth and love.

“Ncoooh cuz, angazi ngithini cuz! This makes me feel soooooo special. I wasn’t aware, you can be this sweet and loving”

“See ... see ... don’t make a black man change his mind from being nice dude...trust me, the outcome is never nice”

“Ok ... ok black man, point highly noted. But on the real though cuz, kubonga mina”.

It had been three months since her break up with Sihle, the love of her life. The thought of ‘break up’ still did not settle well with her. A part of her still firmly believed, they could work things out. She was avoiding using the words ‘Sihle could change’. She had been hoping and praying for that change prior the three months for many months! Mandy had never been a firm believer of changing people ... in fact she did not believe in that. People change when *they* want and when the *time* is right!

“Baby I am soo sorry. It won’t happen again ... and I know I’ve said this before. Please trust me ... please help me”. It would be these exact words spoken from softness, tenderness and desperation as Sihle held Mandy’s hands so tight that, she would once again give in and give

it another shot ... gave them another try for their future. Besides, this was the person she loved most, how could she *not* trust? And even more important, how could she *not* help? When her baby was crying for help. It surely did not make sense.

“Ok, shhh sshhhh, its ok babe ... angiyi ndawo ... let’s try help you ok ... let’s try fix this. I just don’t know what happens with you. It’s like you change. You become someone I don’t know, and I would never want to know! I lose you to this rage and it swallows you.”

“I know sthandwa sam ... please don’t leave me Mandy.”

“I won’t ... I will never leave you babe.”

They would embrace and hold on tight to each other’s bodies, with neither of them wanting to let go. In fact, Mandy never knew when and how the moment of depart ever arrived. She would fully retain her senses when they were either cuddled up in bed or the couch!

The sad thing was that these moments happened again and again and again. They upgraded from again to often and escalated to the worst. They became regular! They were engaged to get married. “How can one commit to an abusive partner? You cannot marry someone hoping they will change in the marriage”. These thoughts were haunting Mandy on a regular basis now. She loved Sihle to the moon and back. But Sihle, as beautiful, loving, sweet and kind as she was, she had a *problem*. She was abusive, emotionally and physically. She had trust issues. She had insecurity issues and when she got into that space, she turned into an erupting volcano, ready to swallow Mandy!

Mandy recalled a night she thought she almost lost her life, Sihle almost killed her. She had pinned her against the wall with both hands squashed into Mandy’s neck ... she was gasping for breath ... her voice was not coming out anymore, even to whisper, ‘please stop’. She felt weak because her head had been banged hard against the wall. She had lost senses. At that moment, it was truly just up to Sihle to stop or carry on!

Suddenly, from nowhere Sihle let go of her neck and moved a step back, shocked at what had just transpired! Mandy fell on the floor. She could not balance on her own.

She was adamant that, this was indeed the *last* fight and *last* time. Sihle had promised and she believed Sihle as she would see the regret, pain and confusion written all over her face after every ‘incident’.

She did not know for certain why Sihle had this violent nature and side of her and she did not want her to have it. And if it were not as bad, Mandy would have accepted and tolerated it. That was how much she loved her. However, it was unbearable, and she had taken enough of it.

She had to face reality. Abusers need professional help. Their loved ones cannot help them. Abusers are very manipulative. They will make you feel very bad for even just considering leaving them. They minimize your role as the victim and act like they are the most victimized. Yes, they are victims of their medical condition, but you are also a victim as a recipient of their condition and the impact is double! Sihle had made this information a reality to Mandy!

Initially, it was not easy for Mandy to walk away, also considering society's views on the matter. In most instances, lesbians are just thought of as 'cute lovey doxies and no drama' perception! Even some homophobes state things like 'they prefer two women *not* men'! So, she struggled thinking how she would convey to society and family that she was being abused by Sihle and that was the reason she broke up with her. And they could not marry.

She had to accept that it was not her place to help her. She needed to get the help on her own ... in her absence. This was the hardest, most painful decision she had ever had to make in her adult life ... to *leave* Sihle! Nothing about her love for her had been tainted even a bit. She still loved her as much as she did from that night, she laid her eyes on her at that bar. And that love had just grown stronger each day, they had spent together. And the truth was, she was waiting for her. There was no other woman, she would rather hold in her arms.

Sihle was calling from the *Anger Management Centre*. She had booked herself in, which was a good thing. She had been there for two months. Mandy believed she was doing well. However, she did not want to communicate with her for now. She wanted her to heal on her own.

She was very much aware that, when Sihle came out, she would not be able to resist her plea for a wonderful night in her loving arms. Nevertheless, for now, she preferred Sihle not to know that information!

She must not know that she was right there, waiting for her! And this was not a voluntary feeling but a natural one.

Mandy did not want to be in the same apartment she had shared with Sihle. Things were just too much of a reminder, even the closing sound of the curtain. She smiled as she thought about how she would tease her on curtain closing. Sihle just had a funny way of closing curtains! “Babes, I suppose the space you have left is for the public to have a view of our love making on the couch neh”. They would both laugh as Mandy would then close the curtain *properly*!

She somehow wished she could erase the time spent with Sihle and only recall the time, she had spent with maZet. “Oh how I miss my beloved friend”, she thought wearing the warmest smile from ear to ear. Of course, she had explained the situation to her friend, who had advised her to walk away immediately! “mfethu, uyazi nge GBV, well, angazi ngoba nina you same gender mara oksalayo, it is violence. You must leave my friend and the sooner, the better”. MaZet had firmly uttered those words over the phone and later honoured her word to come over, dine, wine and sleep over, “so that uphefumule konke my loving”, she finished off laughing and yet very genuine.

Sadly, Mandy had dismally failed to heed her best friend’s advice because she simply stayed ... stayed until, too late perhaps. But there was no point in wasting energy reviewing regret. There are always plenty of ways to indulge and review regret! How things could have been done and turned out ... blah blah blah. She was not about that life especially right now. Therefore, she decided to lie on the bed she had made.

maZet had found her this other nice apartment with a young woman who was looking for a mate. After Mandy went to view, she was happy and checked with the lady and three weeks later, she moved in. It was a neighbourhood she was very familiar with, still in the Sandton area. The apartment was slightly more spacious compared to hers. She was happy on day one ... or little did she know.

It would soon become evident, that the woman had problems of her own as she had just broken up with her boyfriend and the ideal person had just landed on her doorstep to serve as an off-loading platform for all her breakup problems and scenarios. Mandy was certainly not ready to consume all those energies at that time. She could not afford to lend a shoulder and what made matters worse, was that the woman was an alcoholic! So, every day, and this was *every day*, she drank a cheap bottle of red wine from the bottle as she lay on the couch ... waiting for Mandy to return from work. She would then embark on the journey of a drunken self-pity party!

It was one of those typical Sandton situations where the man rents the apartment for the girlfriend and this one is interracial. The boyfriend was white and Scottish. The story went that, he had been separated for twelve years from his wife. They could not get a divorce because they were business partners. Mandy did not have the energy to delve into the validity of that information. The guy had promised to marry her at some point.

She had the biggest smart TV and access to Wi-Fi but claimed she did not know the password. Mandy assumed the woman thought, she might want it. But that was not the case because she loaded sufficient monthly data, and she was not a 'phone person' ... the kind always scrolling just to *see* the next thing! Apparently, the man was the one who loaded data for her and now that they were currently broken up, he had switched off the Wi-Fi!

So, every day and night when she was halfway the bottle, Mandy must start listening to the stories. She was tired; therefore, she immediately knew, this arrangement was not to be for very long. And besides, should the boyfriend decide to cut her off completely, she was not going to be able to afford the rent on her own. She claimed to be a 'self-employed' hairdresser of which is not *the most* unique skill! But reality was, you cannot pay Sandton rent from doing two or three heads a month! Mandy concluded the lady did not communicate the truth in her stories. The boyfriend was her main source of funds! Mandy wished her the best. However, she was moving out month end.

She decided to move in with her other cuz who resided in the East Rand...just for a little while to clear her mind under a roof full of love and family. Her cousin was married with three kids. Yes, she was going to be a Makazi there and forget about her own worries. "Of course, cuz, uyazi anytime udinga usizo, am here for you". "ohh ngiyabonga ngane kaAunt ... what would I do ngaphandle kwakho".

"Just tell me ukuthi uzanini ... yhooh, bazojabula abashana uMakazi uyeza"! Her cuz had warmly welcomed her in advance with love and excitement. "Why didn't I just initially move to my cuz instead of coming via here to suffocate with "blocked- unblocked" Wi-Fi stories". Mandy thought laughing ... not in a bad way though as she sincerely wanted the lady to be well.

She was a nice lady ... beautiful with braids, petite body and nails done to the nines! She did pose that aura of 'am a lady' scenario. That said, there existed a side to her resembling dodginess. As the song goes, 'umuntu ngeke umconfirme'! Mandy could not figure out her story. There are things she locked up in her revelations. But Mandy could fill up the blanks. She had been around. Giggles.

Mandy then did decent thing to inform the lady that, she would be leaving, so that she could put up another ad. She did not want to be selfish like others who just pack up and go if there was nothing officially written, only verbal. They say, Karma is a bitch! She suddenly gained a level of energy she was not sure, where it emanated from. It had been a while since she felt like this. Perhaps, talking about self-pity parties, it was about time, she also closed the curtains to her own pity party.

Sihle was right where she belonged for now. Mandy must also move on.

Those few weeks turned into a few months and would prove to be one of Mandy's best times in her life. She could not recall a time when she lived under a 'family' structure as it were. She had lived 'alone' for so many years, she had forgotten, how it felt.

This apartment life was great, but it was somehow very empty and isolating. But at the time, one does not realize because it has become such a norm under the capitalistic routine world! Most people want 'privacy'! Yes, it is nice to share with a mate you are close with, but you also live very independently from one another. It becomes a self-centred lifestyle that is full of silence.

At her cuz, it was different with three nephews. The oldest was in grade ten and youngest in grade three! Oh boy, at first, it felt like a culture shock if you may! "Makazi can you please help me with my homework. We have to fill up my spelling diary"

"Of course, bring it on son". She would respond enthusiastically to her little nephew's request. She was enjoying this role of 'parent-hood' and she convinced herself, it was an opportunity to practice for when she and Sihle had their own family. She tried brushing off the Sihle thought but realized, resisting that, was a matter beyond her control.

"Makazi, how do you spell 'trouble'? Her little nephew desperately wanted to know. It became almost like, the whole 'draft story' all over again. Mandy was amazed at the fact that, to an eight-year-old, spelling *trouble* was a serious mission! Having to do the multiplications table was even more of a serious matter. For example, four times seven! It was funny! This

knowledge came naturally to adults while little one battles. Then she recalled a time when as a child, how it was also all mysterious!

“Am really sorry cuz for what happened between you and Sihle ... ngiyazi uyavala ngaye 24/7 ntwana yam” her cuz spoke softly and sincere as they were washing up dishes after a heavenly delicious Sunday lunch, she had cooked to welcome her home.

“See, I made the food just the way granny taught us”.

“Yeah, and you almost nailed it cuz...uzamile akufani” she responded laughing. They both knew the statement is a joke as the food was top notch, Master Chef scenario! Giggles.

Mandy was washing up the dishes, an exercise she found therapeutic and her cuz drying. The kids were playing outside. It was a good Sunday.

Chapter 11

The East Rand was certainly a very different, yet in a way very humbling phase in Mandy's life. It was those instances that made one very grateful for the smallest of things. It was a moment of realising her blessings. It also reminded Mandy of the beautiful basic life which ordinary Kasi offered. It was amazing how, there was never an 'official' spirit of 'let us make it' scenario as perhaps was in the burbs of Sandton, where most people were 'hustling'.

In the Kasi, at the risk of romanticising, it was as though the people were not consciously aware that, they must make it against all odds but somehow, did. They were somehow pushed and driven by a hidden invisible force of survival. Unlike the 'rat race', the race was just a natural flow of survival which involved no 'rats' but humans.

What Mandy had forgotten the most was taxi life. And oh yes, there was just something special and unique about taxi life in Jozi. It was a culture and a world of its own.

There were standardized and acceptable things done by taxi drivers which were neither legal, acceptable nor safe! But they were executed religiously with no fear. The point of amazement became the calm level of acceptance from the community or passengers. "How can the people just keep silent when it is their lives at risk"? Mandy would think, vigorously warming up inside. For example, a driver would drive like a hooligan, speeding like it was the Olympics race while carrying passengers and the people would be afraid to scream 'Ey, slow down or what the heck do you think you are doing? Are you even thinking'? They seemed very afraid to confront the taxi drivers. This was because they were famous for being specialists in vulgarity! Akho ntlamba abangayazi. They were also famous for exhibiting extreme, out of context anger levels which were always based and directed by zero logic.

Hence, they had acquired the name "Mageza", all taxi drivers were called Omageza! Of course, you would not make the mistake of saying this in front of them! Unless you had plans to trend on TikTok! Giggles. That said, one did get those who were brave enough. In fact, it was not even a matter of bravery but of trying to simply guard one's life.

The taxi was like a mobile mall ... a combination of different people and different classes. Everybody was on that ride for a certain reason, you could not judge or completely figure out what a particular individual was there for. For example, Mandy was a rider because of her current situation, however, she belonged in Sandton and was more accustomed to the lifestyle

of Uber and Bolt. You had ordinary people rushing to connect to the burbs, your 'Mavis' as they were called ... who wanted to make it on time before the boss left for work. You had the men rushing to connect to the mines ... ka piki nefosholo! One could never scan the variety of people accurately!

There was a woman who touched Mandy who had a very small baby seeming just a few months old riding in the evening. The situation erupted emotions of pain but also inspired Mandy to a calming degree. This was because, the woman carried and exhibited levels of calmness and strength that were not common to find these days. Where everything is like a 'fragile society'.

The child was always bubbly and full of life ... not once did Mandy ever hear that child cry. She was in this together with mom. In fact, it was as if the child was saying 'don't worry mom, I won't make this more difficult for you by crying all the time'.

"When I was seven months pregnant, the dad decided to get another girlfriend".

"Iyhoo, am sorry to hear that".

"Thanks ... its ok, I have healed through the pain now. Yazi, what helped me was that I had a miscarriage in my previous pregnancy. So, I was very determined not to lose this baby. When the doctor instructed me not to stress about anything as I might run the risk of encountering the same tragedy, I knew I had to make a choice. So gurl, when baby daddy started acting up ejola, I did not hesitate for one second to remain in an emotionally and physically healthy state for the survival of this baby. The pain of losing the pregnancy way supersedes that of some guy cheating on you, I learnt that the hard way".

"Wow, you were very brave and wise by making that decision".

"Yeah gurl, some life situations will make you brave and wise and you shall even shock self, ukuthi ngifike kanjani la".

Mandy was so fascinated and mesmerised by the young beautiful lady, that she had gathered the guts to strike a conversation just four days after they had been riding together. She was seated next to her with the baby, of which was a thing Mandy rather did not normally do because, babies cry.

This baby was different, and she wanted to sit next to this baby. She wanted to hold this baby and she wanted to know its beautiful mother.

Her name was Lydia, originally from Zimbabwe. She was Ndebele, therefore, it was possible to mix Zulu with her. As she was not from South Africa, this became a source of strength for her to fight.

"It's not easy to be a cry-baby when you are far from home".

"I can only imagine Lydia".

"So, every day, you must fight, it's even worse when you are fighting for an offspring ... ingane ayazi ukuthi this is 'home or not'.

"That is absolutely true ... they are in the dark zone ... how I wish, I could have just remained in that dark zone ... the light blinds".

"Hahaha, you gotta be joking Mandy, how are you going to fight the procedure of nature? Do you want God to rearrange"?.

They both burst into laughter. Mandy never thought about it that way and she had never met anybody who gave that answer when she moaned and whined about 'adult life' misfortunes. Therefore, on that day, she had sincerely learnt something new and it was a knowledge that she was going to utilise. She was not going to question God's ways of things again. It is nature that children must grow into adults and then there must be death after that. Lydia had been a pleasant soul to meet.

Lydia could not afford a nanny, so she was forced to take the baby with to work in the burbs of Sandton where she worked as a domestic cleaner. Her boss was kind enough to allow her to bring the small child of which she was very grateful for because some bosses utterly refuse with the reasoning that 'how are you going to do your work properly? the baby will disturb you' ... of which that was a logic Mandy did not subscribe to.

"I am sorry, but I don't think we should continue seeing each other" She battled to utter those words. But she had had enough.

It was either she became honest or she continued suffocating.

"What do you mean, I don't understand". Naledi responded with a face full of shock followed by a deep sigh which immediately turned into anger. She wore a face new to Mandy.

"I am sorry, I didn't mean it like that, and of course we are not seeing each other. I meant, we should ... or I should spend less time with you. I mean, I understand, it is your family, and you must see them ... that I respect but I also have my own needs and need space to just be ...

" Mandy replied trying to be as polite and sincere as she could. The last thing she wanted was to hurt Naledi.

"Wow, so you've decided to make that decision on your own. Did you even think about me"? You are just like the other people who come into my life to use me then discard of me when they are done".

Mandy tried to think of any moment where she had 'used' Naledi ... and she was not insinuating a 'discard' of her! Her analysis was a bit shocking.

"You are a fuckin selfish human being, Mandy and now I understand why you don't even have a girlfriend because no one can put up with your shit". These words were spoken from a long-lasting place of hate by Naledi.

Mandy was a bit hurt that this woman was now using the information, she had shared with her to ease her pain against her.

She could not believe that level of cruelty ... the rubbing it on your face scenario. She had no right to do that. But that was not all of it. Naledi was fuming with anger. She looked like a scary monster about to burst. Mandy suddenly got triggered by her own recent past of abuse. She saw flashes of Sihle going through her face. She started shaking and her heartbeat took on a faster pace. However, she did not want Naledi to see that she was very scared of her, at that very moment.

"I am sorry Naledi, I didn't want to make you feel that way ... that wasn't my intention at all and of course I do have regards for your feelings, I would never use you for anything" She responded trying to be as calm and polite as could have been. But it was not to be effective on Naledi!

"You a liar ... you just want to tell me what I want to hear ... well, guess what, I don't believe you 'genius' Mandy! Alright? It's because you think you a genius, is not? You can just fool people into believing you? Well, I am not going to be one of your victims, you hear me"? She was panting up and down with a firm hand grip on her waist.

It sounded like she was reading a script for some series ... playing a character and that character was to directly attack Mandy in that manner because, what she was saying was way out of proportion and exaggerated. These words and level of anger were surely meant for someone else. Naledi meant to say these words to someone but was not afforded the chance or did not gather, the guts. Mandy thought in silence as if afraid that Naledi could hear, her thoughts which would further drive her up the wall!

"Well, am not sure of what you want me to say or do to convince you that what you are saying is way farfetched from the truth". This time her response was a bit firm and grounded. It dawned on her that she had not known Naledi for a long time ... only a few weeks. She also remembered her promise to herself, to never tolerate abuse ... that she would immediately deal with it on the spot.

From the little she had revealed, Naledi was a product of a terrible trauma ... Mandy had been utterly shocked, as a matter of fact that she had been comfortable enough to unburden her pain to her. At the same time, she understood why.

People somehow always felt comfortable with Mandy from onset to speak about anything ... including deep, dark confessions. She had become used to it and did not mind as she was aware that it served as a healing process. One of Mandy's cores being that, we are here on this earth to help one another through kindness and love ... nothing more. Therefore, anytime, you were afforded the opportunity to help someone, in whatever manner, the heavens rejoice, and the world becomes a bit better.

"The most painful part is that I can never take it away from mom". Naledi had confessed soaking in tears.

"You don't have to ... your mom doesn't want you to", was Mandy's response as she gently caressed her back.

"There have been a dozen times where, I have seriously contemplated taking my own life ... the temptation was more regular when I was younger ... having grown a bit, it has subsided"

"Am glad it has, because it shouldn't have been there in the first place".

"It's not easy living with the knowledge that your very presence represents an eternal scar to your mother", as she uttered those words, the tears filled up more as if the tap had now been open to max!

Mandy held her even tighter and honestly not knowing any ideal words of comfort, at that point. All she knew was that she felt her pain, coming from her heartbeat, firmly pressed against Mandy's breast. They both cried and held in silence for the longest time possible.

"My biggest question is, will she ever heal from that? Because as long as I am here, I am a reminder", Naledi continued entertaining emotions of doubt and self-destruction.

"The fact that your mom has told you how much she loves you, should speak loud enough for you to know, that's exactly what she means", replied Mandy in a very confident directive voice while gazing directly into her eyes.

"You've got to stop torturing yourself dude ... you are creating pain that isn't there, think about your mother"... she continued.

"How do you expect her to heal as you say, if you are the one who doesn't let the matter rest? Your unhappiness is going to make your mother unhappy. So, do it for her, if not for you then", said Mandy in a gentler tone.

"Wow, thank you Mandy. I've never thought about it that way ... I have just made it to be about me but you are right, mom is also a victim here and she needs my support and assurance, to know that I do not judge her". Naledi's response sounded fresh and alive. Some life returned on her face as if the fog had cleared.

"You are most welcome my dear. Am glad I could be of some help", replied Mandy smiling ... also relieved that the sorrow was gone from her eyes.

"I know that we've known each other for just a few weeks and here I am bombarding you with my problems".

"Not to worry dude".

"But the funny thing is that it's something I never talk about, especially with people I don't know as I feel, they will judge me and make me feel dirty". Naledi continued.

"Listen here, nobody and I mean, no one has the right, never mind the audacity to ever make you feel dirty about this ok"? Mandy lectured her with both her hands on Naledi shoulders and she rubbed her softly. They tightly embraced.

It was during that moment that Mandy felt something ... something she had not felt in a while since Sihle left. She felt feelings. She felt ... she felt warmth ... yes, she felt another woman! Damn, she had not felt another woman besides Sihle and for a moment, she forgot about her pain. It was as if the tap opened and all that pain was washed away. She felt a burden off her shoulders and enjoyed the burning sensation she was feeling from Naledi's embrace.

She felt desire ... she could not discard the feelings of lust that had instantaneously enveloped her entire body ... her body felt Naledi, but her mind had Sihle. It was at this moment that, she immediately pulled away as Naledi was searching for her lips. Mandy realised, that would be a very big mistake ... hooking up with Naledi! Not because she was a product of rape but because she had not dealt with it properly. And Mandy also wasn't sure where she belonged ... was she still in a relationship with Sihle?

"Why are you pulling away"? Naledi inquired wearing a face of shock.

"I don't know ... I guess Sihle ..." But before she could even finish, Naledi interjected.

"Don't you dare tell me about Sihle, she's not here ... you said you haven't spoken with her in weeks".

"Yes, I haven't but that doesn't mean, I don't want to or that I have stopped loving her", responded Mandy wearing a face of confusion.

Naledi was partially right. What if Sihle had moved on and found someone else and they were happily planning a future. What if that person was visiting her at the institution and they would kiss and make up under the trees? She could not bear that thought therefore, it was immediately discarded. However, she did not want Naledi to know, she had evoked feelings of doubt in her.

"So, it's me that you don't want because you know about my story neh?"

"No, absolutely NO Naledi ... it has nothing to do with that ... and would-be double standards of me if I did though", she answered, desperate to reassure her.

"It is being double standards of you! You want other people to understand and accept me, but you don't", Naledi replied raising her voice.

"Dude, please don't make me feel like that ... what you are doing and saying isn't fair".

"Do you think leading me on and dumping me like trash is fair"? enquired Naledi fuming.

At that point Mandy wore a face of absolute confusion because she did not understand how and when she had exactly 'led on' Naledi?

"Am not certain about what you are referring to"? She replied heavily awaiting a further detailed answer that would address her shock.

"There you go, making a fool of me ... so everything has just been in my head alone? Is that what you are saying"?

"What do you mean 'everything'? What is everything Naledi? Please stop talking in parables or am just going to walk the fuck away from you". Mandy was starting to feel irritated by her heavy accusations. She had no right to attack her like that and portray her as someone with no feelings or care ... a monster.

It was that moment that Mandy's phone rang ... her cousin telling her about a death, a funeral she had to attend. She immediately said her goodbye to Naledi, thinking, the timing was perfect because she was starting to be very bored with her! The matter was closed. Hence, she had decided on the following day that, she was going to be honest and stop chilling with her. The feelings or rather lust that were erupting in her were not a good idea and would be disastrous for any friendship relationship, they would have had. They were both wounded at the point of encounter. It was not going to work because for Mandy, it would have just been a night of passion, while Naledi would have felt 'used'.

So, Mandy called her to say, they should meet because she wanted to talk. She was not ready for the response. However, she later realised she should have expected anything, based on the behaviour she had been exposed to, the previous day.

Mandy could not begin to comprehend of the anger. And to be honest, she did not know where the devil, she felt burning inside her erupted from. She felt this humungous fire and desire, it was a driving force at waves never known to her. She became a two-legged devil with seven horns on the head. She did not even have a clear reflection or sight of Naledi, all she recalled was grabbing her by throat and just vigorously smashing the living hell out of her. She never knew she could be this violent. She became Sihle and Naledi became Mandy. The scene looked and felt very familiar. She exerted all the violence that had been deposited onto her by Sihle.

She was just beating the woman like her grave was dug already! She had so much anger inside. In her head, she could not believe she had allowed Naledi to make her, a victim, once again.

"I have been through the most in life. I don't deserve this level of abuse", She groaned as she had Naledi pinned to the ground with both her knees firmly implanted in her stomach. Naledi was gasping for breath.

"Am sorry ... am sorry. Am sorry, you are killing me" ... she was battling to make the words audible. She exhausted every breath in her to utter those words. Sadly, it seemed, they were falling on deaf ears.

A miracle happened. Mandy's senses returned. She looked shocked by the scene she saw in front of her, being the staring. She immediately jumped off Naledi and put both her hands on the mouth. She did not know what to say. There was silence between the two.

Naledi battling to get up, she first changed her position facing towards the right ... trying to find some balance.

"Don't you touch me please", said Naledi as Mandy was stretching her hand to assist. She knew that was a bad move on her side. Of course, Naledi was not just going to welcome her assistance with both hands, when she was the instigator of the mess ... of the pain she felt.

"Am terribly sorry Naledi. I don't know what possessed me. I didn't mean to hurt you ... oh my word ... I can't believe what I just did".

She murmured as warm tears were streaming down her face. It was that scenario where one's sincerity is absolutely discarded, as if falling on a rock! That was the response and atmosphere she received from Naledi as she was sobbing, now on her knees.

"I deserve I t... please beat me up, I beg of you. I want to hurt as you are hurting Naledi. Please make me bleed. I want to bleed". She screamed at the top of her voice.

"If you really are sorry, then please, can you just start walking the hell away from me? Please because only then, I might believe that you are sorry".

"But you know I cannot just do that. I cannot leave you like this Naledi, well not in this state". Mandy responded as she looked at the bruises and the blue eye, she had inflicted with her heavy boxing champion fist! Her mind kept playing the scene. She was trying to recall how she got there. The truth was, Mandy had never ever gotten into a fight before ... let alone raise a hand to another, especially a woman!

"For heaven's sake, I am a resilient advocator of women's rights. I am a liberal feminist ... how could I do this? How could I fail and betray my cores to this magnitude"? She ambushed herself internally. It suddenly dawned that, she had not actually openly dealt or 'treated' the after effects of the abuse from Sihle. It was something she always avoided thinking about or sharing in depth with anyone.

The closest person she had communicated the matter with comfortably was maZet, even with her, they still had a laugh in between, as they always did about everything, no matter the serious nature of the situation.

Sihle had wounded her. She was hurt physical but most of all, emotionally which trickled down to the mental. She was mentally dented by Sihle's abuse. And because she never openly spoke about it, it got buried. The problem with burying things like that, is that any situation resembling the burial, triggers flames. And that was exactly what happened. All the retaliation that was due (lack of a better word) to Sihle, was delivered on to Naledi.

She got so lost and absorbed in her own thoughts of remorse when she snapped back, Naledi was of sight. She had gone. Mandy wondered what she was going to do.

Perhaps she had gone to the police station to open a case. She was ready for any form of punishment because, what she did warranted no solid justification. It could legit fall under post traumatic umbrella because she was a victim of violence. The thought of those words evoked shivers in her body. As an activist, this was a term she was very familiar with but for other people ... certainly not her. In fact, she never thought she would ever be a victim of such.

Not simply because it is men who generally abuse women and she was aware that some women abuse other women. The critical point for her was that she had always been adamant

that, she would never hook up with someone capable of such! Even worse, that she were capable of such.

"me, ME? you mean I? never chomi, not in this lifetime" She once confirmed with maZet.

"You know what they say about the dangers of using 'never'? bathi DO NOT do it" had been maZet response as she laughed.

After an intense reflection and introspection, Mandy took her phone out and dialled the number that had been calling her and she never answered.

"Baby I want you back".

"I have been dying to see your name written on my incoming calls, on my phone screen, my love".

Chapter 12

Mandy was overcome by a feeling. She wanted to go to church. She had not been for a while and after the encounter with Mpho, she believed, it was a sign. She had to reconnect with her God. Sihle, the love of her life, did not exactly get excited about the idea of Jesus. This took Mandy back to her cousin's situation. He once loved a girl who did not belong to the seven days church. His family did not approve but eventually chose her over the church. This was exceptionally inspiring to Mandy. Therefore, she knew she would choose Sihle.

So, she understood when Sihle did not want to go to church with her.

"Baby, it's ok. You go ... am going to be in this bed missing you".

"My love but I would truly appreciate you accompanying me".

"Mandy, we're not even gonna argue about this. I am not coming. Please.". Sihle responded with the most serious face Mandy had ever seen. Mandy looked at Sihle - her beautiful Sihle, this beautiful woman and perhaps for the first time, she knew just how much she truly loved her and the depth of that love ... certain ... true and eternal. It flooded Mandy's body. It overwhelmed her. It had been two years now and it still felt like last weekend! Suddenly, she had all these thoughts out of nowhere ...

"How could I ever survive nor live without her?"

Mandy felt a sense of emptiness deep inside her. It rose from her stomach into her throat. Tears started streaming down her face. She did not want to cry but it was not a choice, and she averted her face, embarrassed at being the weakest link, sort of to speak.

"My love come here," Sihle grabbed her by hand and led her to the bathroom.

"Shuuu ... am sorry ... there is nothing ... absolutely nothing, I wouldn't do for you..."

"Dyame, am crying. Am sorry baby. I didn't mean to" .

"You didn't mean what?"

"I mean to cry".

"If you cannot cry to the woman you've been making love to for two years, who else do you wanna cry to?"

"But babe, you ... you ... the look in your eyes scared me".

"Am sorry my princess ... but you know what is going on ... maybe, that's just it ..."

Sihle was on her period! So maybe

This was another fact that Mandy knew all women go through but men never manage to understand. It hurt Mandy how the world takes menstruation lightly. It does not comprehend, the pain. Of course, it varies from woman to woman - but sometimes, it feels like being in labour for twenty-four hours! Then you have a boss who cannot understand, why you could not be at work that day, especially if they are one of those males from the Stone Age era. Or you have a male lecturer from the Stone Age era, who will not understand, why you could not make it to class.

“I won’t be able to make it today because I am on my period.” Simply as that. That was the world of liberation, which Mandy dreamt of. She could not recall the exact details, but she remembered reading that, some country in Europe affords, three-days leave for women who are on their periods. As mentioned, it varies from situation to situation, from month to month, woman to woman. Some women in that month can ‘handle it’. Some may require one day. Some may require the full three days if suffering from heavy bleeding. “These are the things that need to be communicated with the Stone Age male and world,” Mandy digested heavily. Therefore, she understood why her babe did not even want to leave the house, it was not just her lack of enthusiasm for church!

“Sshhhh,” Sihle whispered as she pinned her close to the bathroom wall adjacent to the shower. She started rubbing her nose against hers, rubbing her cheeks with her nose, rubbing her lips with her nose, and finally locking lips. That kiss of passion, pulling in and out ... the lips are on the tongue ... then the forehead ... then nose ... then ears. Then neck and back locked in for the longest time. Mandy lost all her religion at that moment. Her hands firmly squeezed in her perfect buttercup breasts. There was something about Sihle’s breasts that always drove Mandy insane. In fact, she could not ever imagine her hands on any other woman’s breasts for as long as she lived. “I guess it’s life’s simple pleasures that keep a person happy,” Mandy had always thought.

“I love you soo much baby,” Mandy whispered.

“I love you soo much and I love fucking you soo much”.

“Fuck me now baby...fuck me now ... am all yours”.

Clothes lay on the floor. They were in the shower, soaking, having crossed to that world that only the two of them visited and had now made it their home. That beautiful world. The water felt like some form of purification and affirmation of their love. It was a present witness to their love but also, as they call it in Anthropology ‘participation observation’. It was participating.

It always sucked, when returning to reality from their world. But the most beautiful source of consolation was that Mandy returned to Sihle’s beautiful face, still in the company of her warm arms ... and a dozen kisses on the forehead!

“That fuck was soo good babe”.

“You know how crazy my libido, is when on periods babes”.

“I think I do”.

“But even better, I love fucking *you* when you on your periods ... dayme ...”

“I know the pleasure you derive, baby ... you psycho ... should I be worried?”

They both burst into laughter.

“Am your psycho ... too late now”.

“And am terribly in love with this psycho”.

“And I know, your next date is 22 ... six days from now”.

They both burst into endless laughter.

“Babe, don’t be late for church”.

“Mmh, must I really go.” She responded with a sad face.

“You have to...that is what you wanted to do”.

“True that but I just wanna be with you”.

“Hey, don’t get too crazy now about the good fuck my lover! You be comin back to it ... and for the rest of your life.”

“Ha ha ha ... are you tryna be nice or bad?”

“Babe, you know for you, am nice and bad ... especially when bedding you!”

This was followed by another long kiss of pure passion. But both knew it could not be entertained any further. Sihle was right. Mandy must get ready for church. And she appreciated the support and discipline of her love. Sihle was that partner who was not ‘super responsible and rigid’... she cared about the things Mandy cared for and she always guided her back on track to make sure she did not ever become wreck less with anything related or linked to her passion. And yes, Jesus is someone Mandy was passionate about in her life.

Sihle’s birthday was coming soon. Ok, granted, just after the six days! Soo her desired session was going to be an early present! Giggles. But she wanted to do something special and simple for her. “One of the most difficult moments one encounters, is never really knowing what to get your lover for a birthday, even though you do know because you know them,” Mandy had debated in her head. But of course, what counted the most was that, they were going to have a beautiful time.

She had organized a surprise party. Nothing majestic, just very close friends and family. Of course, Sihle’s mom (the under-cover dyke, lol) was going to be there. Her dad sadly, would be out of town on business. Mandy’s aunt was going to be there, and her fav married dyke cousin. Mandy was truly grateful for the support of her aunt because, she was meant to go to Durban but decided to cancel the trip and committed to attending Sihle's birthday at Mandy’s request. “My aunt definitely loves Sihle,” Mandy smiled alone, deeply touched by the

gesture. And of course, maZet was going to be there. Mandy still missed her a lot. They had been spending less time together and maZet was not shy to highlight the matter to Mandy. Mandy could not remember the last time they went out together.

“That’s why I always hate it when friends fall in love. Friends get dumped,” maZet complained.

They both laughed.

“Am your fuckin housemate for flip sake”.

“I know buddy and you know I got your love and back always”.

“Whatever Mandy! Your love and back are Sihle! Go sell that script elsewhere chop.”

“maZet ... am hurt ... why are you doing this to me”.

Another endless laughter.

“Of course, you know am pulling your leg. I love how happy you are”.

“Thank you, my love”.

“I couldn’t be happier for you. And she’s a wonderful soul”.

“Ncooh, we using words like ‘soul’, my friend is getting deep”.

“Go shoot a rock Mandy” maZet responded as she cracked into laughter. But it was a valid observation from Mandy ... maZet wasn’t exactly a ‘deep’ person if that makes sense. She was absolutely surprised by the use of that term.

“I guess, we learn something new every day my friend,” Mandy replied, sealing the conversation.

Besides the surprise party, Mandy did one of the things she loved most: penning poetry. She wrote a poem for her lover, simple and heart felt, nothing awards winning. But she had already won the biggest award, her heart. She had it framed in a very expensive design. She was shocked at the price. But felt it was worth it. It was a delicate piece of art. She had never seen such a frame before. This was going to be Sihle’s gift. And she knew the delight Sihle felt for her writing. She was always mesmerized by any piece, Mandy showed her. At first, Mandy had thought, “Of course, it makes sense for my lover to love my work.” However, she later realized Sihle *actually* loved her work. This inspired her to do more.

“Baby you are so talented. You have the gift. You have the passion. Make this your life and quit the 9 to 5,” Sihle would say to her.

“Thank you, the queen of my heart. We shall do it one day ... for now, let us receive the blessing and progressive thoughts. And that’s one of the reasons I adore you so much ... my adoration”.

Mandy loved how moments of compliments were always followed by moments of passion, usually a tender embrace accompanied with a passionate kiss or depending on the vicinity, oh...a timeless engagement of love making.

My Beloved Sihle

When I First Laid My Eyes On You.
I Knew My Heart Had Found a Home.
When I First Held You In My Arms.
I Knew My Body Had Found Endless Warmth.
When I First Kissed Your Lips.
I Knew My Passion Had Found an Eternal Spark.
When I First Touched Your Body.
I Knew The Definition Of Sensational.
When I First Felt You Come.
I Knew You Have Come For Life.

Sihle literally cried, tears rolling down her face, when Mandy presented her with the gift.

“Mandy, I could not have asked for a better gift. Words. Heartfelt words. And I know, you are words ... you love them so much, it takes me home. I always look forward to returning to your words, when we are apart ... be they verbal or written. I am going to treasure this for the rest of my life”.

“I am so happy that I tried so effortlessly, and it worked. And I mean every single word penned Sihle”.

“That’s one thing am assured of, my love”.

“I love you, Sihle. May the good Lord bless you with many more years”.

“Thank you, I receive the blessings, baby”.

“And may He bless *us* with many more years ... *happy* years ... may we never lose each other in our own presence”.

“That shall never happen baby. We are here for life”.

At the surprise party, Mandy knelt on one knee and softly murmured the words, she had thought about since day, she met Sihle, but was always afraid of uttering. She was ready to commit to, an eternal love in confusion with Sihle. The truth is, life is just a confusion. This is because it does not come with a manual, so your best shot is to find someone that you are going to share this confusion with, in love - not a misguided love, not a deadly love, not a chaotic love but true love, in all its forms of confusion, love in all its madness, all its politics and precariousness and passion and forgiveness.

“Yes, I will marry you”.

Part B: Portfolio

Portfolio

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Creative Writing

of

Rhodes University

by

Sanelisiwe Sihya

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Fierce Writing

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Poetics and Poetics of Punctuation

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Writing from Objects

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Contact Week

Book Reviews

Thesis Reflective Journal

Poetics of the Wor(l)ds We Live Essay

Reference List for Poetics Essay

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Writing in Community Project

Book Reviews

The Lover by Marguerite Duras

A Working Woman by Elvira Navarro translated by Christina Macsweeney

Married Love and other Stories by Tessa Hadley

All My Goodbyes by Mariana Dimopulos translated by Alice Whitmore

Introduction

The journal reflective process was a great reading experience which grew both my reading capacity and writing capacity but perhaps even greater, the platform to accept feedback for one's presented work. Below is a compilation of the course work covered for the degree, various forms of writing and tackling writing and engaging writing and enjoying writing.

Fierce Writing

The second week as a MACW student, I felt more at ease, confident that I had made the right choice against all odds. This is an imperative point of entry for me to mention, as I had to deal with some personal issues which had the potential to hinder my participation in the course. It is a fact that the personal affects the professional, in this case, the academic. I, therefore, cannot cope academically if not well, on the personal. This has led to me being behind and not having sufficient time to engage in the course and indulge in the marvel of reading.

We were introduced to 'Fierce Writing' by Kerry. It was a session I thoroughly enjoyed. I was exposed to different forms and arts of writing and was introduced to some wonderful authors. One of the things, I must say, is that I realized the heavy need to remember the authors names, something I thought would be impossible initially as one shall be doing extensive reading. But then, I imagined the situation as a music fanatic, that all the songs I love, I know the title of the song AND the artist name! So, that same protocol ought to be in place with knowing the authors.

The 'Fierce Writing' is based on Poetry (should mention that). One of the things I have learnt about poetry is its level of dimensions in terms of variety when it comes to style and presentation. Hence, at times, we find ourselves asking, 'is this a poem', does it 'qualify' to be a poem, if there is such. In my opinion, everything is nothing but a piece. The world can get as creative as it wishes to classify that further. That said, one of the pieces that touched me was a poem by Booker Malika "Pepper Sauce".

A very painful scenario, one would imagine ideally, a grandmother is a symbol of love and security. Grandparents are the ones that supposedly spoil the kids when the parents are being 'mean'. So, to have such inhumane pain inflicted by a grandmother comes as demonic. It reminded me of the story of Abraham in the Bible, where he took his little boy, Isaac to the mountain for sacrifice. The little boy asked the father, where the lamb, meant to be sacrificed was, as he could not see it. In the poem, the poor girl is preparing ...chopping ...assisting in the making of the pepper sauce, of which, she shall be its victim! Its recipient, not in the normal way, where one would enjoy pepper sauce with a Sirloin steak, for example. The poor girl is somehow the steak, in this case. The cruelty that this world has arrived at! Anyway.

There was an assignment attached to Kerry's section. There was a day I missed. But the second week was a good week. I am getting more comfortable with the feedback session. I am learning to be less personal and simply observe the feedback like information that could be utilized or discarded.

I continue to enjoy the sharing and exchange of anthologies.

Meeting Poetry

This is the third week. It is an exciting week for me, on a personal note...as I realize that amid everything going around, I have something extremely important to be grateful for, that is, life...my birthday! Yes, it is my birthday, on Tuesday, I turn another year old! I laughed alone, as I recalled one my fellow classmates had read a piece and when I was asked to comment on the piece, I uttered ... "I like that, it was a Tuesday.....then it was a Saturday". She had used those two days of the week. I teasingly wanted to add, "cause that means weeks have been shortened, we only have Tuesday and Saturday"! Anyway, my birthday was nice.

We continue to exchange the book anthologies. I enjoy the sharing of the stories. I enjoy reading the two pieces that am afforded to choose. Of course, I realize the need and have the urge to read more, just that life's situations have not permitted me to do so. However, that is to change. Soon. This is the last week. I affirm with self, as my momentum builds up for the course.

I am introduced to the work of Christina Kloess, 'The Hardest Button'. This is a well written piece which has the ability to confuse you if you 'don't read between the lines' as they say. One can miss the fact that it's about the animal kingdom, not humans! Another piece well enjoyed is by Andrew Farkas, 'The Colonization of Room 313'. I enjoyed the narration and the subtle sarcasm he presents to diss some of mainstream popular ideologies. This made me inquisitive to read more of his work. Another author, whose work sparked my attention, is Lydia Davis 'The Mother'. A piece of few words as loud as can be! A precise painful piece. It interrogates the ideal notion of mainstream, that mothers naturally want the best for their children. They are 'nurturers' and so forth. Some would say, everyone can be human sometimes, irrelevant of the title that society has bestowed upon them nor one they have 'earned' themselves! Another piece I extremely enjoyed was by Taban LiYong 'The Old Man of Usumburi'! a marvellous piece of read, well written.... carries a sense of harmony and coherence, well intertwined. And the story line is wonderful, sad as it may be. There are lessons to be learnt.... self-reflection if one wants. It is like that good old story, told in a manner that makes it new and relatable! Like it was back in the day, when old tales were told around the fire to teach children life's lesson.... where to thread and not! Another author that sparked my interest. In fact, he is the first book I have taken out as a loan from Paul! The beginning of a habit! It is a small piece, I cannot take two weeks reading it, as I heard that is the duration one must possess the book.

We had 'Meeting Poetry' with Mxolisi Nyezwa. It was an enjoyable session. I enjoyed the compilation pack, particularly the first poem by Mahmoud Darwish 'To a young poet'. It touches on some personal sentiments I hold on poetry as previously mentioned. I guess we share a common liberal stance with this writer. In fact, it is a stance not only exclusive to poetry but writing in general, I believe. These mainstream Ts and Dots can pose harm to suffocate one's ability to write. There was an assignment given for the session also.

We also had a poetry session with Mangaliso Mabuzi at St Peters, with other zoom participants. I got to meet Robert, for the first time, whom Stacey said, according to her, 'Robert is the best poet and publisher in the country and he started this MACW course.' I felt inspired and said, "I will start my own course one day." He did seem like a humble man. He offered to make everyone tea or coffee. He was taking orders, basically! I did not request coffee.

It was another great pack of poetry compilation. The very first poem introduces us to the legendary Mafika Gwala 'The Children of Nonti.' He is someone I respect, in the sphere of Black Consciousness and all, a field I engage heavily on. A very nice, clean and written piece. A crystal-clear piece with no drama going on. As in some pieces of poetry, there can be so much going on, that it almost feels like an over decorated room! I love Gwala's style of writing. It was interesting to learn from Stacey that he wrote this poem a few minutes before addressing a rally! Exceptional natural talent is what I call it! I did not see the other zoom participants. These live meetings are to happen once a month, otherwise, it is every Thursday via zoom.

The other writer I got introduced to was Work Jensma, 'Spanner in The What? Works'. Wonderful piece. I got intrigued by his personal story. It is very sad to know that, up to date, his whereabouts are unknown. It is funny how he says in the poem, 'he would like to leave a mark.' He has left a mark, we are reading his work, we know that he existed. One would say, his wishes have come true. He is also one of the writers that have sparked my attention. I would like to get to know more of his work. Or even better, I would love to read a biography on him. His personal beliefs seem to be those of a noble man, with regards to the previous regime in the republic of South Africa. Such men are always worth recognizing because without them, a lot of things would not have been. They made possible what others wanted to make impossible. On their part, I would have to believe, it was a risk worth taking.

Yes! Week three, we hit word count! We are cracking it! We must be careful not to get too comfortable and EXCEED word count.

Stop. She said.

Writing Obliquely

Week four into the program, we were introduced to a very interesting aspect of writing: the politics and punctuation and musicality in poetics. It was a beautiful creative way of digesting the concept and role of punctuation. Indeed, punctuation plays an incredible role in writing. It can bring radiance, stagnancy, movement, rigidity and so forth. The seminar was held by Stacy Hardy...a very familiar face of course...as we met with her in orientation week. She is more like family!

One got to realize that the cores of punctuation are musical and breath strokes based! It is like when talking, you take pauses, you cannot talk non-stop. Sometimes, you even laugh, bringing in the musical aspect.

We were introduced to some wonderful writings, demonstrating various forms of punctuality or the lack of. We watched a beautiful clip of a Cameroonian film maker (whom Stacy reckoned to be the best African film maker), Djibril Diop Mambety. The short clip is shot at a bar, late at night...therefore dark and he has obviously not denied himself from the contents of the bar, it would seem.

Mambety uses grandma and grammar narration...also to be rhythmic, one would assume! Bringing in the musical aspect, as it were. He mentions how the grandma emphasized the liberties in writing with regards to punctuation. The grandma basically stated that, 'grammar' should not deprive the writer from creativity. As in too much focus on abiding by grammar rules, one can lose or perhaps not articulate best the message of the writer.

We were introduced to some wonderful writing and writers. We were introduced to a beautiful quote by writer Sasha Pimentel, where she provides a classic description of what a comma is and advocates its importance... "but in poetry, the comma can be how a poet controls a poem's time against that larger, more brutal time." Very powerful quote.

We had an excerpt from Tram 83 by Fiston Mwanza Mujile of the DRC. A piece I thoroughly enjoyed. I even requested more of his work. I loved the creativity in the piece. It is full of

such sarcasm and humour...sometimes, deadly humour! It reminded me of William's "All American" piece. I love his style of punctuation via "And"! Everything is just "and... and... and...". His sentences are connected through 'and'.

This contrasted with the Saddiq Dzukogi (Nigeria) piece, where he only makes use of full stops in between sentences. "A List of Things I Do Not Tell My Mother" ...the title. It is a very orderly piece, presented as a list.

Another piece I enjoyed dearly was an excerpt from: Autoportrait: Non-Fiction, Edouard Leve (France). A beautiful piece of autobiography. I loved the harmony in the piece. It is a heart pouring out piece...a very personal piece...almost an outcry of some sort...full of both sad and great moments.

We did a free writing session, where we had to just write with no punctuation added. It felt weird and thrilling. It felt good breaking the rules, especially after we had been told in the video clip!

My delight when I saw one of my favorite writers, an excerpt from Dambudzo Marechera..."Black Sunlight 1980". I love this guy...particularly love the famous love letter he wrote to his ex-girlfriend when leaving London! I subscribe to most things written there. His writing is very complicated on a normal day though. I find him too creative and descriptive at times...should there be such!

We also had Aime Cesaires's "Notebook of a 'Return to the Native Land'" ...without any words, just the punctuation. I find this a bit awkward, to be honest. I guess I fail to capture the 'profoundness' of it all. It is words that tell the message, the punctuation assists in the process. It is NOT the main character. It is like sending a messenger without a message! What are they going to tell? Anyway, that is just me.

I also engaged with work recommended by Jo-Ann Bekker, "Mina Needs Rehearsal" an excerpt from Dorthe Nors, who is a Danish writer. I found the piece to be very calm. The deliverance is well crafted. The other book I started reading is by Yuko Tsushima, titled "Territory of Light." I have not finished reading it. It was on a list of books sent by Stacy Hardy to us. My eyes landed on this one. I was captured by the title. So far, I am enjoying the theme and narration in the book. Now that we have dealt with the poetics of punctuation and so forth, it is interesting how I now pay careful attention to punctuation. To find out what role it is playing towards the piece or what rhythm it is presenting. It has certainly made reading

more fun. On page 35, the title of this chapter also connected me to that; "The Sound of Voice." Though the story is not directly related to that. I am truly grateful to the amount of books Stacy has provided us with. One shall surely indulge in the variation. It was a pity that I missed her seminar. It is indeed good that I had submitted the work prior and received excellent feedback. I found it funny how she questioned my choice of work in her assignment. It made me think a lot about which direction to take going forward with regards to my writing. A versatile writer! Lol.

It's a new month soon, one is ready to march towards greater things. The work so far has certainly groomed my way of seeing things when it comes to writing.

Poetics and Poetics of Punctuation

This week's seminar started on an interesting topic, personal for me. Our seminar was based on 'Book Reviews' facilitated by Paul Wessels...the vessel of the course, I suppose. There is much I can say there.

I am a bit familiar with this platform as I have been exposed to it. I also know it has become a bit artificial and deviated from its original purpose, lately. This is based on various reasons of course, some being commercialization and greediness for money and so forth.

I was currently at a point where I have lost interest in the importance of book reviews. I thought they are pretty much irrelevant these days. The seminar revived my spirit and belief towards the importance of book reviews. Also, I learnt, under academia, the engagement is different from commercial...for example, some review on a book written by a celebrity compared with a review on a book written by a writer. There is a huge difference.

The seminar taught me how important book reviews are and that we still need them. I learnt how important it is to write a 'good' book review...as intertwined as that might sound. The role of the book review is to paint or present a clear picture to someone who is clueless on the matter...make them understand what the book is about. It's a translation in a way, this is a foreign language, and you want the next person to understand.

We read different book reviews which taught us different styles of writing book reviews. One has to learn how critical it is to be rather less personally involved when writing a book review, unless one is certain to master that collaboration. I also learnt how important it is not

to be rather harsh, as if there is a certain hidden agenda to cut sales for the writer, when writing a book review. This of course, is not to say, one should romanticize everything or make it all rosy...rather be more appealing towards painting a good picture of the book. At the end of the day, it is the reader that will make their final decision on the book. They may agree or not agree with your review...either way. What I am basically saying is, try to write a nice book review!

I enjoyed the 'Mother Box and Other Tales' review, written by Sarah Blackman. In my opinion, she messed around a bit with involving the personal yet excluding being loud on it. The review is purely about the book. It's presented in a manner that covers almost everything on the book. You get exposed to certain scenarios, ideologies and philosophies engaged in the book. She presents in page 22, beautiful lines like "...Altogether, Mother Box offers a serious introspection on the isolation, frustration, and bitterness of domesticated women." If the task were to write one line as a review for this book, this would have been it!

We also did another uniquely written book review by Paul Wessels: NOTEBOOK OF A RETURN TO THE NATIVE LAND by Aime Cesaire. It is comprehensively and coherently written, from capturing time and space...for example, its original conception. It is orderly and presented in fragments. For example...firstly...secondly... and so forth. This form presents a neat structure that carries the reader through the book. It is neither academic nor personal. It is simply about the book, where less is more. We also did "Tender Buttons: The Corrected Centennial Edition' by Gertrude Stein.

Our assignment was to find book reviews on the books we have in our course. This was not an easy task. It is rather a bit of a battle to accomplish such, especially if one is looking for 'professional concrete' stuff, as we know, the internet offers everything. It would seem, the ideal way, would be to use the library...go back to basics.

The various forms of reviews presented by classmates were rather interesting because we all had different sources. There were some 'academic reviews', 'too personal reviews', 'ordinary reviews' and basically standard reviews...those I would classify as ticking all the boxes. For example, to demonstrate the beauty of a well written book review, I enjoyed the review of 'We Make Mud' yet when we read the piece, I did not relate anything to it. The reviewer did an excellent job in presenting the writer's work. On a personal note, I also learnt that I am not a fan of 'academic reviews' that are loaded with bombastic words and concepts! The point is to convey the message as simply as possible, not to demonstrate to us how sophisticated you

can compile terms and concepts. The truth is when a sentence or paragraph is loaded with so many 'big concepts', in most cases it becomes meaningless! There is either going to be repetition or cluster...definitely no harmony! Harmony and order are important in any form of writing. Those are just my views.

We had our reading session as usual. I found the work of Kate Bernheimer 'Whitework' a bit interesting. I also enjoyed my selection of Diane Williams' "Sweet" ...whom I chose under my book review search. However not same book.

I had my meeting with Paul, which was helpful in terms of guidance and progress. I also met up with Stacy Hardy who was very helpful on the personal and professional. Those few minutes we had brought a different perspective to me as a writer. She analyses my work, the way I do. I felt inspired and ready to do more.

Book Reviewing

This week on Monday, we met with Paul Wessels, giving feedback on our book reviews. All mates shared the difficulty experienced in finding the reviews. In fact, I had plans to go to Amazwi Museum to get some reviews but never made it...nonetheless I shall still go, especially because we have an assignment to write some book reviews of our own. I did discuss in my previous journal entry the process of book reviews. So, I believe, it would be a bit of repetition to indulge it again.

We then had a non-present presentation with Henali Kuit. The seminar was recorded and printed. It was a Prose Seminar: Writing Simply. My excitement at the glance of 'writing simply' as I am a huge advocate of this genre! I looked forward to it. Talk about counting your chickens before the eggs hatch! I got so confused. It seemed there was nothing simple regarding the content of the assignment. I really struggled initially with the concept of 'motifs.' I guess, in my lay mind, I wanted simple. I over-analysed the term 'motif.' Hence, I struggled to engage with the assignment. It was only later in class when my fellow mates briefly explained to me what was expected that some light was shed. Henali was also very helpful in the process. Motif simply means repetition. So basically, this 'one thing' must show up, more often than otherwise in your piece. And it cannot be a 'theme' because the 'theme' shall be the product. I learnt.

We read an excerpt, 'My Feet' by Evelyn Hampton. We also read 'The Metal Bowl' by Miranda July. A piece I enjoyed very much. I loved the style of writing, the content, sarcasm and humour in it. Some real-life concerning issues were presented with a touch of humour and lessons conveyed. The sad reality is that we still predominantly live in a world where menstruation is still shunned upon by males. And few parents bother to teach their boy child about it. Sad, when one thinks, this is the very process that determines whether there is going to be life or not!

I would certainly love to read more work from July. It is also a very sexual piece that presents unconventional forms of marriage. Not sure if this is the right term to use because, most marriages do border around some of these issues...or they are encountered. It is sad, what she got herself into because of her naivety regarding the video scene. Well, she was young as she says and needed some bucks. The 'motif' would be established later, of course.

On Tuesday, we met with Stacy Hardy on our normal reading sessions. I enjoyed most of the readings we did. I did an excerpt for 'Some Day Like Superheroes: A Povella by Lauren Schiffman. This was a fairly new term to all of us...as we are mostly familiar with 'Novella'. Stacy basically defined the term as meaning 'invention'. We all joked around it...I said mine shall be a 'Savella' then!

I found the piece to be very ordinary...not much to write home about. As much as Schiffman has tried to cover the important events in the life of this girl, it is somehow still a bit disorderly...presenting no concrete direction. The only line that captured my fancy was "The only aphrodisiac is power."

We then did a piece called 'A Brief History of Condoms' by Kim Addonizio. A piece, I found, as I mentioned in class, to be rooted in a patriarchal stance as the theme only focuses on condoms solely used by men! There is no mention of women in the functions of condoms. Typical popular view of men as sole appropriators of sexual relations! Let me stop before I get carried away. I did mention that I like how the guy praises the condom though. He is very comfortable using it. This is something I am not familiar with, as I always hear, men don't like condoms and so forth. So, I think, the world would be a better place if most men shared his views of condoms.

We did a piece by Aimee Parkison, "Intuition." Oh, what a beautiful piece! I loved the content, the storyline. It is beautifully written, simple, orderly and brief yet no detail missed. The writer took me right there to that room. Now, that is some achievement in a piece, where

you do not only imagine but you are there. The words carry you there! And we spoke about why it is titled 'Intuition.' A marvel read indeed.

Friday, we had our zoom session with Manga and Henali. It was nice putting a face to the voice. Henali was very understanding towards my initial confusion with her assignment. I am grateful, she took the extra mile to communicate with me via whatsapp also...so we can have more examples of motifs. It got late, I panicked to contact her, especially on a Saturday and all! I said, get on with it, Sane.

Motif in Music

To Love Somebody by Nina Simone

There's a light
A certain kind of light
That never shone on me
I want my life to be lived with you
Lived with you
There's a way everybody say
To do each and every little thing
But what does it bring
If I ain't got you, ain't got?

You don't know what it's like, baby
You don't know what it's like

To love somebody
To love somebody
The way I love you

In my brain
I see your face again
I know my frame of mind
You ain't got to be so blind
And I'm blind, so, so, so blind
I'm a man
Can't you see what I am?
I live and I breathe for you

But what good does it do
If I ain't got you, ain't got?

You don't know what it's like, baby
You don't know what it's like

To love somebody
To love somebody
The way I love you

You don't know what it's like, baby
You don't know what it's like

To love somebody
To love somebody
The way I love you

You don't know what it's like, baby
You don't know what it's like
To love somebody

My most favourite artist of all time, after Nikita by Sir Elton John.

Do you know what it is like to love somebody?

Nina Simone, a classic piano player, exceptional performer, possessing stage capture like never.

It would seem, the motif is To Love Somebody

Writing Simply

This is week seven. We kicked off the seminar hosted by Nathan Trantraal...titled Re-Writing. It has been a very long week for so many reasons. I keep finding ways to get the journal 'right'! Then I get reassured when I hear, 'no right...or wrong' Sane. I loved the Except from 1 Kings 3:16-23...Solomon's Wise Judgement. Here two women had given birth simultaneously to two babies. But the other woman killed her baby at night as she slept over him. Deviously, she exchanged the baby with the other woman without her knowledge.

The other woman woke up to a dead child. Her motherly instincts would inform her that this was not her baby. She confronted the devious woman. The devious woman insisted this was her baby. It went back and forth until the matter was presented to king Solomon. The king came with a solution: divide the baby into half then! The devious woman gladly agreed. However, the actual mother, as she would not bear seeing her baby slaughtered into half...said no, rather the woman has the baby! The king said, ok, give the baby to this woman because she is its mother! Powerful story from the book of life!

We then had the usual reading group session with Stacy. We discussed intensely what is expected of us by the end of this course...we discussed the reflective journal structures and were to be given examples of previous students' journals, names omitted of course. Nonetheless, Stacy emphasised the importance of being original and sticking to self. No copycat vibes! We were given some 'not compulsory' assignments. Just self-benefit. This was an exercise based on the readings we did during the seminar. For example, a piece of writing based on questions, a piece-based on stereotypes and a passive aggressive piece. I like this method as it serves as guidance to kick start writing...basically improve the art of writing.

I enjoyed Ilya Kaminsky's 'Little Pot.' The piece and story line somehow reminded me of the "Old man of Usumburi.". Those good old fairy tales with themes that are still applicable to the contemporary world and will probably remain so, till infinity. It is a simple well written piece that requires no further digestion.

A rather strange piece was read, 'Macarena: The Screamo Version' by Ana Carrete. If a piece needed some 're-writing', this one would certainly qualify! I wasn't sure what was going on here...no solid content nor rhythm.

My personal meeting with Stacy was super productive after our class.

Friday, we had the feedback session, where we shared the drafts submitted on Thursday. I have to mention that I was very happy to actually have my copies there. It was the very first time. Previously, there has always been something that made me not have copies at these feedback sessions.

I had my meeting with Paul...very therapeutic.

I had taken out the Aimee Parkison book: Woman with Dark Horses, as it was said that 'external' reading is important for the course. I truly enjoyed reading the book. Some short

stories were better than others, of course. For example, 'Smile, That's Why he Loves Her' on page 135, is very interesting... bit of a confusing set up for me.

Lots of sexual connotation

Homosexuality?

Is there incest here?

There is pain and hurt.

Then take 'Textures' page 44...a piece revolving around dolls. It did not flow smoothly for me...also because I am just not a fan of dolls!

Then you get a piece like 'The Answer' page 113.

I found it to be a unique piece of writing. It is full of different scenes. Everything is just a question... no answer. I almost thought perhaps, it is just a collection of different random dialogues, as presented in another piece we did. but, here, some of these scenarios re-emerge as follow up. It is open ended! One of those pieces, you must discuss with someone else.

My favourite piece was 'Corolla' page 93. It is a beautiful sad story! Wanda and Aunt Joan. It tells a lot about the miserable state of women, when it comes to appearances and the body, in general. Most of these women are not happy deep down. They always have this desire to maintain a standard that is pleasing to the fantasies of the man...sadly at their own expense! That time, some of these men are just psychopaths like the character, Daurdy! She is just a confused little girl who seeks love and guidance. There was never a communication to instil some confidence in her. Just violence and drug abuse, which would lead her to be attracted to women! She was never exposed to any good relations where a man was involved. Instead, she lost her sister to suicide, an idea, she found hard to accept.... especially because she was expecting!

Rewriting

The journal for week 8. Monday was cancelled because of the shutdown march that was planned by the Economic Freedom Fighters political party. Tuesday would be a holiday,

critical in this country's history and reconciliation. It is called Human Rights Day, in commemoration of the blood shed at the Sharpeville Massacre. It was not a success for me.

The session was held with Mthunzi Mbungwana under the topic: The Art of Making a Clay Pot. My conceptualization of the title is basically, all the ingredients one requires to produce that piece of writing and arrive at that point of saying, submit! The tools we are all being given under coursework for the final execution of the 'bigger' submission.

As much as I could not make the seminar, I was fortunate enough to meet one of my fellow classmates who briefed me on what was done and had to be done after. I did the assignment, and I enjoyed the readings.

Friday was the feedback session on assignments submitted on Thursday with Mthunzi, via zoom. I enjoyed the feedback. My classmates enjoyed my piece, one of them even stated, "it's one of my favourite pieces by you so far..." a highly appreciated, motivational sentence in these tough times on my part. There was a bit of 'editing' to be done, spotted by one of my classmates. They said, they love the piece because they could absolutely relate to it. It is a realistic piece, capturing moments that all of us, have gone through or heard of, at some point. So, basically, the content, storyline and the style...someone said 'flow', my classmates liked. I tried to accommodate all the suggestions presented by both our facilitator and classmates in the final submission.

I also enjoyed their writing. There was an extreme variety of content...including something like an 'autobiography.' They presented different styles of writing, I guess implementing and exhibiting some of the stuff we have been exposed to. I enjoyed the liberty displayed to try new things, in some of the pieces.

I enjoyed the Old Photographs by Gabeka Baderoon.

It is a love piece of poetry. It has a simple flow. It is silently loud. And of course, the content...I absolutely relate. I also enjoyed Botswana Rain by Wame Molefhe. I found the storyline to be beautiful. I could have written this piece. I love the style of writing in it. It is such a painful story yet delivered so mildly that, someone could miss the depth of the pain! And I was not happy with that suicide note. It's as if there was never a note left anyway.

I had my Friday meeting with Paul, another productive session. I was informed to write about what others said about my work and what I said about theirs... a task I have attempted to complete, above. He suggested I do some folktale and fairy-tale readings and presented me

with two books as recommendations, which I appreciate. I was advised to comment less on the content of the story and just state what I think of the writing and what I have learnt. I did enjoy my mini narrations of the stories though. So, I guess, that means, less to jot on the journal.

On my personal reading, I enjoyed reading Amanda Michalopoulou in *Why I Killed My Best Friend*. I love the storyline and theme. I love the background setup and how it alternates. It has a rhythm of its own. I love the style of writing...humorous and sarcastic. It follows no conventional form of writing. Very creative content contained. There is a strong presence of rhythm...the paces of the dialogues are fast, feeding off each other. You do not want to miss a moment!

Secondly, would be *The Second Substance* by Pablo Strauss. It is another unique style of writing I was exposed to, perhaps, a style I would not necessarily follow. Currently, I am engaged in *The Idiot* by Elif Batuman. It is a work in progress!

Poetry

The week after the very brief vacation. The seminar was held by Paul Mason, introducing us to the practice of 'Narrative Conventions and Making it New'. My layman interpretation of the theme is that it presents a very linear, organised and a bit of structured suffocation to writing. My substation being that one must be guided by the invented form of narration by whoever first initiated this form. Perhaps, my analysis is not on par, however, that is what I understood from the seminar. You are given a recipe on how to bake the carrot cake. It is standard. You stick by it. For example, you must have the 'protagonist, setting, plan, event and theme.' I am not fairly clued up on the 'making it new' part because we are following a certain given structure. For me, making it new would be, we are not following the structure. Perhaps, it is an implied form of 'rewriting'.

We were given the 'Hero's Journey Model', divided under three structures...namely, Act I... Act II and Act III. This is called a 'Practical Guide'.

Act I constitutes of the following in the writing

Ordinary World

Call to Adventure

Refusal of the Call

Mentor

First Threshold

Act II, which is basically, the crisis moment

Test, Allies and Enemies

Approach to Inmost Cave

Ordeal

Reward (seizing the sword)

Act III, being the Climax entails

The Road Back

Resurrection

Return with the Elicitor

We were given an exercise to write our own words or terms abiding by the narrative conventions structure. We then exchanged these amongst each other, so that no one uses their own terms. We briefly presented the mini stories created.

Tuesday, it was the reading session. It was with Nathan. He mentioned something, a tool I found crucial...that one must engage the text they are reading and deconstruct it. It resonated with me very much. Because sometimes, one can just read without engaging the text. More like, 'sleepwalking.' You are essentially asleep, but you are walking. This happens especially if you are reading a boring text. I am now more conscious of that trap.

I read 'Little Pot' by Ilya Kaminsky. This is a very nicely written piece. I like the piece because the story line is relevant. It engages the old school back to basics method of instilling education or lessons via fairy tale. I related even more as I have been reading a lot of fairy tales and African Folktale. I took those two books. Having read the story before, I also thought, perhaps, the little girl is also a symbolism of something else. The fact that you are surprised at who has the solution! All the adults had to wait for this little girl to save them in a way. I like how it is presented, the punctuality and the mellow musicality presented. The narration allows no complication. I relate it to the man of Usumbura.

We then read 'Deer Dancer' by Joy Harjo. This was a reading I exceptionally enjoyed...not because it featured one of my favourite songs 'Lucille' by Kenny Rogers! I love the way that song was used and just perfectly fitted into the narration of the story and theme. I absolutely have no criticism of the piece. I love the sarcasm, the humour, the hope and imagination and creativity of the piece through simplicity...it is a realistic piece. And the title reflects some connotation, I believe. There is a reason why it is not 'Dear'. There are these powerful lines: to relieve despair.... the real-world collapses...who could not survive a sober day."

The other reading was Tsipi Keller, 'Hello and Thank You.' This I found to be a very suppressive piece on the note of practising the beautiful concept of individualism! The main character is mundane to her own internal reality of which I find very funny because she is very much aware of it. I suppose the clue is in the title. She must just be that woman of 'hello and thank you' and never revealing or engaging who she is. We did touch on the 'presentation' of the story...the motion was, it could have been better presented. It is dull. I thought this could have been intentional by the author to be in alignment with the title. I like the style of writing. It is directive, like, the reader is guided into the next chapter. Also, a taste of emphasis through repetition, of which, it is something I like, I repeat a lot in my writing. This line for e.g., pg. 254 "... she didn't think of herself as undesirable, no she didn't..."

I have been reading 'Strange Things Sometimes Still Happen', Fairy Tales from Around the World, edited by Angela Carter, and African Folktales by Roger D. Abrahams. I enjoyed both the presentations of the stories from these books. I like the writing, however, not so much, for 'The Hare's Hoe' in the African Folktale, for example. I was captured by the title 'Friends for Time', a choice I did not regret. From fairy tales, we learn that, indeed, strange things still happen.

Friday was Good Friday, the day the Lord was crucified two thousand years ago, for us who subscribe to Christianity.

Narrative Conventions

This is week ten into the course. Monday, we did not have a seminar as Paul had some problems.

On Tuesday, Paul conducted the seminar on ‘Writing in Community’...which I dearly enjoyed as this is a topic or aspect, I am very passionate about. Anything that has to do with writing and community catches my fancy because information dissemination is imperative. The writing must reach the community and the community must be exposed to the arts of the pen and paper, particularly the young ones. The learners need to be introduced to this exciting form of art soonest.

So, we were given the assignment ...work in pairs or solo ...go to any cluster of the community and conduct a reading session where you read your work and hold a free writing session. As I am mainly a soloist, I chose to work solo and my audience shall be school kids, high school kids. I am looking forward to this.

The seminar was also very intense, not in a negative way. We discussed the up-coming ‘contact week’, where we must choose a supervisor and engage in the long final project of September. And the up-coming first book review.

On Tuesday, the reading seminar was held by Nathan.

I did a reading from ‘African Folktales’ by Roger D. Abrahams, ‘An Eye for an Eye’. I enjoyed the reading. It is a nicely written piece. The theme aligns very much with folktale content. However, I do think the ending could have been presented in a different manner. It is simply written in the conventional style of punctuation. There is nothing ‘disorderly’ to sort of speak. It teaches us the practice of honesty and being humble and how that is rewarded. As the good old saying goes, ‘the truth shall set you free.’ I do not like how it normalises violence against women. The author just engaged that part as a norm. It is an old folktale, I suppose. It would therefore be critical of contemporary folktale writers to shy away from such practices.

The other reading was by Zbigniew Herbert ‘The History of the Minotaur.’ This is a piece I absolutely did not resonate with. I liked nothing about it. As it was explained in the seminar that it is just a mere account of the history of the minotaur. It just explains stuff. There is no story. And I, personally, was not interested in what it was explaining. The writing is very dull!

Then there was Michael J. Lee's 'Last Seen'. A very refreshing piece which I enjoyed. I like the style of writing. I liked the theme. I liked the rhythm, fast pace...it keeps you on your toes as it's written in a dialogue form. I also like how it does not mention the names, but you figure who is talking now and who is responding. Sometimes, I engage this form in my writing. 'Unquoted dialogues' sort of speak. I also liked the shortened method; it presents a poetry structure. But it's not a poem.

Lastly, was Bessie Head, 'The Prisoner Who Wore Glasses.' I liked the painful theme. I also related very much to the content as it is local. So, it made the piece more enjoyable. I do feel the presentation could have been done in a more exciting manner. This is very powerful content presented in a weak manner.

Personally, I have been reading 'Blood and Guts in High School' by Kathy Acker, 'The Family of Pascual' and 'The Lover' by Marguerite Duras. This was in search of my selection for the book review due on the 30th. Then I chose one of them. That is what I have been reading.

Voice

This is week eleven. Time flies indeed. The Monday seminar was conducted by Mangaliso Buzani. The written title on RU is 'Xyze'. We are going to do 'Still Life'...Objects as source of inspiration. We all joke about how we thought these were snacks!

It was a very interesting and eye opener session. I have never actually done or literally considered tangible objects as a source of writing. My ideas always emanate from my small head! We did a free writing section from the selection of any object on the table. A 'free writing based on still life' session...three minutes on your selected object...adrenaline rush! It was fun. This exercise also required precise attention towards the interpretation or rather, identification of the objects. Indeed, not everything is as it seems. I was one of the victims of this. For example, an old rusted doorknob, I mistook it for a small 'weightlifter' thing from the gym! And I politely proceeded writing about the importance of gym. But I appreciate the

moment. I learnt; it is very much relatable in the field of writing. Sometimes, people misunderstand your work...misinterpret it or simply fail to identify your cores. Then proceed to write a long analysis back! It was also interesting to have two people unknowingly select the same object as the analysis is guaranteed not to be the same. The eyes do not feed one another. We were then given the assignment.

Tuesday was the reading group, facilitated by Nathan. The first reading was 'Hotel Rot' by Aimee Bender. I did not enjoy it at all. I found it to be very boring. A lame piece of writing. I do like the descriptive nature it presents, whereby she makes certain that the scenario is spoon fed. I love the closing line, "...Please write a letter to the world, and tell them to stop it." I can relate to this because there are many letters, I want to write to the world to tell them to stop it.

We did 'Letter to a Certain Dr Bill' by Kristine. I like this reading. I enjoyed the theme, its content and narration. It is well written and very standard, punctuation wise. I like the title also...it got me wondering, had he forgotten as he is confused under the medication. I like how the pain in the piece is presented with a subtle manner of sarcasm which lessens the volume of despair in the piece.

We did 'The Love Organizer' by Kristiana Ehin. I like the simplicity of the writing in the piece...the theme, not that much. It bordered along the lines of a third grade fairy-tale. There was nothing startling for me.

The final piece was 'The Apartment' by Jordan Castro. This was a piece that brought some life back! I love the piece. It is a piece that is relatable. I like how it's briefly written. There is so much information shared here, that it could have been 10 more pages. Yet the writer manages to give so much information in tiny amounts without confusion or gaps that need to be filled up. I like this form of writing. It has some funny lines. It is a nicely done piece of 'freedom and rebellion' when leading that lifestyle. A bittersweet, I guess.

I have been mainly reading for the up-coming first book review deadline.

Friday, we did the feedback on our assignments. There was a variety in the approach of the assignment. Everyone tackled it in their different manner and Manga said it was fine, something I found good because rigidity can be a bore.

Writing from Objects

This is week twelve. We continue to proceed. Monday, the seminar was facilitated by Paul Mason. It was titled:

‘Soliloquies/Monologues/Disquisitions/Diatribes/Raves/Raps/Rants/Insults.’ I am not very sure of some of the meanings of these concepts as they were also never explained. Perhaps, they are meant to be ‘common’ knowledge. We were given some internet links to go watch YouTube.

We read some work, extracts from Thomas Bernhard. I enjoyed some of the writing and content. He writes without any complications. I could relate to some of his mindset. I particularly loved the extract: Extinction: diplomas and titles. This is some of the stuff I write about as an intellectual. I am very conscious and careful of the ways of the system and the way it always seeks to enforce its capitalism driven ways as a way of defining human existence. Of course, only those who lack self-esteem and confidence rely on these void titles to translate their personal human existence. I enquired on the date of this piece because the legendary Marechera wrote very similar content to this, in his letter to ex-lover. One would have sworn, Bernhard read that letter first before writing this!

We also read the Paul Mason piece ‘Occupation.’ A piece I enjoyed very much. I even commented that, “wow Paul, you were woke in 1986!” I love the content, the style of writing and more importantly, the philosophy engaged in the piece. Bernhard piece, Marechera letter and Paul piece, all these pieces are very interlinked. They are dealing with the same elephant in the room, just from different styles of presentation.

We also did some work of Lesego Rampolokeng, “Rap Century & Rap Attack.” We also watched a clip of him when he was here at Rhodes University for some conference or so. He obviously falls under the rant rage. I must say, as much as I associate and assimilate in politics, he is engaging... I do not particularly like that style of heavy ranting. I prefer mild ranting as I, myself, rant a lot. He is just too loud for me and I do not like the ‘complexity’ of wording. I do not like people presenting a whole paragraph or sentence in concepts. He reminds me of the great poet, Linton Kwesi Johnson, the difference is just the calmness in deliverance. Johnson could do the same piece by Lesego, however, in a more organised

manner! With that kind of heavy ranting presentation, I feel as if only the high, shall enjoy the work! Anyway.

We were given an assignment to write our pieces on ranting also.... select a figure or object or concept or 'ideal' to rant on.

Tuesday, it was the reading group which was facilitated by Nathan. It was a very productive session. I even commented, it was the first time we spoke the most in a seminar and everyone agreed they liked that. Sometimes, it is good to engage the contemporary, socially...like moving away from a robotic point of departure. At the end of the day, we do not live in the readings but in society. So, it is important to translate what we read into society... escape the 'bubble' as it were.

I did 'The Letter Trick' a folktale from Strange Things Still Happen. The piece was generally ok, written in a simple manner with repetition that almost did not make sense because it did not even serve as a means of emphasis...ideally, repetition is meant for that. I guess the writer focused more on conveying the lesson.

We read 'Everybody Is Waiting for Something' by Andrea Kneeland. I liked the way the piece is written and style of punctuation... nothing extravagant. It carries some eye-catching lines. The content, not so much eye-catching for me but I got what is going on. I love the title. We are all just somebodies waiting for something in this world.

We did the 'Search Party' by Brian Allen Carr. This is a piece, almost written in poetic form...interchangeable dialogue. I like the wording simplicity.

We did 'Afrika Road' by Don Mattera. I like the style of writing and punctuation. The personification of the road was also highlighted. I could obviously relate to the content because it is the horrific history of this country. I am very familiar with such work. However, I felt the piece was over clustered. I understand that the writer tried to put in as much as possible to depict the scenario...it's sad that it resulted in being too much due to the presentation! There is no rhythm in the salsa sort of speak!

Then Friday happened! I arrived. They had left.

Soliloquies, Monologues, Rants

This is week 13 on our reflective journals. We cannot escape from reality and the fact that, sometimes things just do not transpire as initially conceptualised! This sad fact is deeply entertained by the system! We live in a country that is slowly travelling down route to destruction. And we are all as citizens just sitting back doing nothing about it except complain to one another about all the inconveniences! High levels of passive engagement of which personally, I strive not to entertain.

The above dialogue is linked to the fact that we could not 'meet' with our facilitator for the week. This was Monday and Tuesday. Though, we were going to conduct the seminar via zoom anyway.

The content of the seminar was based on "Voice". This to me was an eye-opening angle in the field of writing. I like the idea because it brings emphasis to the basic concept of writing...as they say, 'everybody has a story to tell' so for me, the concept sort of magnifies that thought and empowers me to be aware of the power MY voice carries. And I do somehow feel that it is heavily related to re-writing, well, particularly based on the assignment given. When you are the writer, you are the voice! The presentation, poetic, rhythm, pace, articulation and musicality of your content, is what defines your voice! Hence, it is imperative to stick by, for lack of a better word, the mundane point of departure to represent YOUR voice. You can pardon the 'externalities' from their analysis!

Friday, we did, however, manage to zoom with Masande. It was good to put a face to the name, since we had all been communicating via email. The zoom conducted seminar was a super success... very motivational. He plugged us up on some healthy academic talk in terms of the path of writing. He also highlighted the crucial point of how language interconnects with your voice. This was a point that ignited another aspect in my head. We seem to take for granted the role language plays in deliverance or comprehension of a piece. I have had to deal with this hands- on! Or rather face on...where I realise, the reason sometimes, I am not relating to this piece, is because of the language used.

He also mentioned the crucial point of being acquainted with the idea of 'unlearning other people's writings'...which is a stance I personally resonate with. It is a good idea to enjoy someone's writing and all but do not under engage the perspective of your own VOICE representation. Of course, this with me would be also heavily interrelated to content. You

must have your voice emerging. I learnt that, when “we read, we co-create.” I have never thought of it that way...I must say it is such a fascinating eye-opener!

I have been reading ‘Redemption in Indigo’ by Karen Lord. Lord’s debut novel is a subtle beauty. She somehow has a particular style of writing which is uniquely presented in her deliverance. She manages to take the reader into a diverse journey.

I love her simple style of writing. She is, in my opinion, a representation of ‘simplicity is the best form of sophistication.’ She has managed to capitulate a desired form of articulation from the chapter titles. The titles are highly interconnected to the content. Having read a variety of books, I am a huge believer in titles. There should be a supreme link between the title and content. This is specifically important in the writing of articles.

She presents us with a dimensional package of philosophical and social concepts. She has a way of simplifying that which could, perhaps, be complicated. There is also a low mode of evolution.

I like how she has tackled critical issues on a subtle note. Subtle seems to be her point of departure, indeed!

Lord has alleviated the genre of folktale telling. The punctuation is standard...nothing disorderly nor unnecessarily extravagant. She is at the ideal point of saturation, as they say in chemistry. The rhythm and tone are organised. As we referred to the poetics of writing and musicality, here, Lord presents us with that state or scenario...when at the orchestra and the whole orchestration of the event runs smoothly! It is fruitful.

There is wrath, humour, cynicism and it engages in, perhaps, a bit of imagination ‘teasement.’ Other scenes are deeply rooted into that folktale concept, however hard we may try to connect them to reality.

It is a well written book.

Contact Week

This was the 'Contact Week' I am not quite sure why it is called that.... it is like we are 'contacting' each other, however; we have contacted one another. I truly enjoyed the week. It was quite benevolent on a personal note. It felt like a 'family gathering'! and there was also food provided which made it seem more connected and personal. I felt this deep connection with all the teachers and classmates. It is sad that I did miss some sessions due to unforeseen circumstances that are socially defined as 'unfortunate' ... which becomes contradictory to my core beliefs as I believe everything happens for a reason and it is ALL interconnected. I am assured a piece of my when riding on my Christianity faith, which tells me ...its ALL for my good! So therefore, there is NO 'misfortune'. Let me stop. I am getting to much personal, idealistically. And I laughed!

On Monday, it was Kerry's session. She was the opener of the week! I enjoyed the session, revolving around 'senses. It resonated with a previous seminar we had with Manga, however, just slightly detailed and more engaging as there was prior specific content prepared.

Under the Free Write session, we covered the following...namely: sense of sight...texture...smell...taste... I enjoyed my written pieces on these topics. I have discovered something I never knew before, that being, there is something so smooth and liberating yet denying when it comes to a timed free write. One feels this adrenaline pressure to make time and squeeze in what you want to say...while having a mouthful, sort of speak! I have come to love free timed writing and I first learnt about it during the 0-week when Stacy gave us the task. It is like a 'quickie', you just have so much time to get to that point.

I got a gift. I had written on my piece, how I would love to have that object as a gift! Little did I know, Kerry would later say, "you can keep what you have" to the class. That was a defining moment for me. I like it when the law of attraction is manifested. I believe in The Zen. And amongst the items, we were given dark chocolate. I am not a fan of that, but that stuff was delicious and delicate! I think I am swayed...I can handle that brand of dark chocolate! Everybody enjoyed the chocolate!

Then we had this session where we were given random words to pick from the pile. Your 'secret ballot' kind of vibes. And did I not pick one of my core favourite words. Once again, I felt the law of attraction at play. Should you be curious...the word was 'Kindness.'

Tuesday was Jo-Ann's session based on writing as children or about children. I enjoyed the session as it made me travel back to memory lane and spark some simple, pleasurable moments of my childhood. I felt those vibes of 'things we lost in the fire.' There is not much

I feel I have lost in the fire. My own contextualised fire that I have to own up to! Well, one day. It was also extremely aligned with Kerry's session as the content still involved sense. We also had a free write session.

Then there was a reading session. Stacy was the allocated candidate. I loved her piece... the content and scenario. I write a lot of work along those themes. And it was nice to know we were the first recipients of the piece as she had not read it before, unless my English failed me! I do think it was said.

Then we had the defining moment ...abstract thesis discussion. I enjoyed the exclusive setup of the discussion and in a weird way that I am not willing to explain now, it was like the FIRST time I felt like a master's student...particularly from the angle of being a writer.

The next reading session would come from Kerry. She read her poetry compilation. I enjoyed the poems and was wowed by the fact that she has put her 'self' out there! As a very private person, I cannot imagine myself exposing myself out there! Well, that is maybe because I am a freak and I like it that way. I want nothing to do with this world. I just live in it. I am a universe person. But I like how her poetry is set in the contemporary. Like basic things one can relate to. I sometimes get exhausted with this practice of ALWAYS presenting poetry from the Mediaeval era or 'foreign' poetry! Can we please talk about NOW and preferably in South Africa, where we currently reside? So, Kerry's poetry fed into this delusion of mine.

Then we had the feedback session on our pieces. My piece, I had obviously read before in our seminar but there was something different when I read it again with the contact week audience. It was a nice different. It was the first time I felt like a writer! And it sounded so good, like I had not written it! I was a stranger to my own piece. I felt so inspired. I enjoyed the feedback.

My other classmates read their pieces and feedback was given.

Universe save us all.

Thesis Reflective Journal

Having written many reflective journals through coursework, this one surely feels the most personal and grants one a sense of ease and achievement...to look back and realise how far we have come. I am now writing a reflective journal based on my own piece!

The manner of narration using an external omniscient narrator seemed to be the chosen route. As affirmed by the Reader Comments “What a lovely, thought-provoking and sensitive body of work created by a writer who is at once astute and curious. Sanelisiwe Sihiya has managed to successfully capture a love story with all its gory emotions, without falling into the cliché trap”. It was a challenging bold stance as Mandy, the protagonist, is a very strong liberal character. One of the biggest challenges was to impose a sense of control, that is make sure Mandy does not get carried away, sort of speak. I wanted the reader audience to hear Mandy but also for Mandy to hear herself...the two travel and learn together.

Time...I chose a non-chronological and fragmentary narrative...this again to accommodate Mandy’s liberal, diverse and versatile character. She can never be really contained into a space and time as her mind travels all over. Her presence is naturally nomadic if we may. This afforded me to engage and expose as much of Mandy as I could without preciseness and actual accountability in time terms of which I feel also brings a bit of freshness and intrigue to the poetics of rhythm.

This approach alleviates a complex character development synergy...because one can present events out of order and in fragments which affords greater depth in the character’s psyche. This is simply demonstrated by the way Mandy’s backstory and motivations gradually intertwine...therefore creating a richer and more nuanced character. This approach may also keep the reader audience on their toes! One never knows what is coming out of Mandy’s mouth next. As affirmed by Reader Comments...” the narrator becomes Mandy and zooms in -out...it works very well with this body of work”.

This therefore presents a heightened reader engagement because non-linear narratives engage readers more actively as they must work to connect the narrative pieces and discern the overall story. This intellectual engagement has the potential to lead to a more immersive and participatory reading experience.

The emotional impact which is greatly accommodated through the non-chronological narrative was preferred in the piece to intensify the emotional resonance of the story. This approach allowed the writer to gently present Mandy's emotions to the reader audience in an ambiguous manner...she comes across as tough, but she is also a very gentle, most loving soul who just wants the best for everyone else. Hence, she is not a fan of the system. The above can be substantiated by Reader Comments..." The inner conversations that pull the reader into the hidden parts of Mandy's life is a clever device to reveal her bit by bit but also hiding some parts that the reader never sees but can only guess at".

The exploration of subjectivity is best under fragmented narratives to mirror the way people remember and perceive events, therefore adding layers of realism and authenticity to story narration. This was extremely important because Mandy is a 'loaded' character, for lack of a better word. It was very tricky to stick to the 'laws of fiction' writing, if there is such, while simultaneously presenting all of Mandy's personal ideologies...dodging the dictatorship bullet! It was important to keep Mandy 'light' as damn complex as she is! This is also achieved through further engagement of her sense of humour...she is a sucker for a laugh. Pity she never laughs all the way to the bank, as it were! This motion was also observed based on Reader Comments..."weaving in political and societal issues through urban as well as township settings, the backdrop of the story/stories effortlessly capture a tapestry of a modern woman living and loving and pensively observing love-hood."

The blending of romance and the political turned out beautiful after all, love is political. Both these terms are confusing.... hence the title of the novella. An engagement noted from Reader Comments..." As a central character of the story, Mandy is a type of cornerstone from which the story flows. But she never comes across as self-obsessed or self-absorbed. The writer has managed to create a sympathetic yet strong narrator who is both touched by the stories of those in her world and opinionated and passionate about certain subjects, directly or indirectly affecting her".

Can for example, the great legendary Biko's 'I Write What I Like' be read as a love story? The answer would be an absolute yes...for one, he was a being full of love...full of love for

the greater human species in its variations, ideologically or racially which seems to be a foreign concept in contemporary society. We may reflect, for example, at the love political story of Mandela and Winnie...one of the most painful and beautiful love political stories to date, particularly in this country. Love liberates...politics liberates! And a stew of the two affords the epitome.

Of course, Mandy is not Biko by the biggest shot, but she has been clearly influenced by his politics ...more critically so, this is done through the contemporary state of society. There are no 'once upon a time' vibes. Mandy's political utterances are fresh and modern and relatable to the average citizen of this country, regardless of background. This was affirmed by the Reader's Report, when they said...they did not feel 'left' out, sort of speak as a white woman of which was one of the greatest acknowledgements to the writer because unity and love is what I represent and promote. It comes as no surprise therefore, that I am delighted these approaches worked out well. I would be committing treason if I did not mention that it is because I have a brilliant supervisor who saw these things before, I even did. She understood Mandy from day one and when that happened, I knew how to fly and develop Mandy. Had she not done that, Mandy would not have come to life and yes, I am aware, this is not an 'acknowledgment' session...however, it is my personal reflective journal of the journey of writing this piece.

This production was also achieved through the immense engagement from substantial reading of various authors...for now, we can but name a few. The good predecessor writers as it were. The likes of Duras's 'The Lover'...Noor Naga's , 'If an Egyptian Cannot Speak English'...Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story*...Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*...Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay With Me*...Akwaekwe Emize's *You Made a Fool of Death with Your Beauty*. This is just but a few mentions of the wells.

Queer love stories...indeed I have refused or denied the platform to exceptionalise or sensationalise the presentation. It was very important to present Mandy's liberal stance in contemporary society, particularly when it comes to queer narrations. The idea of romanticism and the forces of the system to forever seek to make homosexuals feel like they are obliged and owe society the greatest explanation to explain their personal sexual preferences, is bizarre! Things like 'coming out'...a being only comes out once...there is but one birth! According to Mandy, the practice of 'coming out' remains derogatory. It is a practice meant to simply satisfy the sick curiosity of 'heterosexual' culture. Gay people

know who is gay amongst themselves and their social circles. So why the need to come out to people that do not even engage your sexual preferences! It is like telling a vegan, we know you do not eat meat, but you must know the people that do. In aid of what? We do not have to be an 'advanced' society to figure, the above is unnecessary!

It is of imperative urgency that we, as contemporary writers of queer fiction, rectify this redundant narration. It is our duty to provide a platform of liberty for upcoming generations so that they do not have to be subject to such heterosexual constraints!

This bold stance to narrate Mandy's character was challenging but worth it and the final product culminated in a beautiful combination. Another bold stance by the writer was to end the novella on a positive note. Yes, granted, we live in a society where the original concept of all seems to be fading away daily. This is a result of the humongous growth in the culture of consumerism primarily intrinsic into materialism. 'Love' can be bought these days and without money, it does not survive. Its existence is only fuelled by money! It remains of critical importance to promote the idea of love because it has not been completely wiped out. Some people do still live happily ever after because they are not controlled by the teachings of the system at large. It is therefore rather a strategic intentional end as opposed to a 'cliché' ending.

Of course, once again, other love writers have taken different approaches to the narration which is fine and welcome. I am this writer who has taken this approach. The works of Emmanuelle Pagano, Tessa Hadley, Micheline Aharonian Marcom, Mariana Dimopoulous.... Contance Debre...to mention but a few.... for example, as mentioned from Reader Comments... "Another highlight of the text is the writer's ability to play with words..." She saw it as an emotional cold, a cold that froze the idea of their love...love she so hoped for". "She followed Nicky as she proceeded towards the gate to open the lock that closed the lock to her heart". Close quote.

The play with words also borders over to play with language, particularly the language mix in presentation. This is rooted in the appreciation of expression. Some things can never be expressed precisely if translated into their native language. The message loses authenticity and any humour or sorrow carried within. Furthermore, a certain character cannot speak in a certain way if the writer truly seeks to engage the audience. It is also just a South African thing. We keep it local as it were!

My writing has enormously grown richer and stronger. One is truly grateful to the various writers I have been exposed to and learnt from as mentioned and captured in the bibliography. One of the most important things was for me to establish my own voice...my own way of storytelling...my own ambience as it were, and I am genuinely happy that the course content and my supervisor afforded me that platform.

The Reader's feedback was one of the most beautiful pieces of writing I have ever read, particularly concerning me. It is the most beautiful book review I have read to date...needless to say, treasure for life. It was an extremely professional, accurate, very experienced writer kind of analysis. But above all, what humbles and captures my heart the most, is how I can feel the reader enjoyed reading my novella. As a reader myself I know how beautifully and sensational it feels when reading something and enjoying it...you cannot put down, you must finish, or it haunts you and you must go back to read once free. You prioritise the read!

I absolutely agreed with the Reader's feedback points, however I could not accommodate all but the greatest of which I feel, is sufficient was to agree to change the title of the novella. I must say, it was not an easy decision to do...it is like naming a child and home affairs tells you when you want a birth certificate to change the name of the child! Giggles... ok, perhaps not as dramatic a scenario. But the Reader's choice made sense and was not far-fetched from my original title.

The Readers Comments captured well my themes in the novella..."the writer's themes are politics, urbanisation, kasi-culture, love/passion, stats and data and blending language playfully to link such topics." I could not have put it any better. This of course was also achieved through my relationship between reading and writing. Reading clears and feeds the mind to be ready to write. It serves as a sharpener...which makes one sad to see how unsharpened the generation of today is.

After submitting, I still want to continue writing and publishing. I would love to publish this novella, as a matter of fact. I find it very deserving as it has become very well crafted. I have surprised myself. I am born to write and engage in the field of information dissemination. I call it The Arts of the Pen and Paper.

To be quite honest, I struggle to pin down 'struggles and challenges' when composing this piece because I love writing...it comes naturally, so I do not struggle to write when given a liberal platform. Therefore, for me the biggest challenge and struggle would be meeting and making deadlines of which has been defeated hence, we are here now!

It has been a lovely journey of an eye opening, self-development experience as a writer...yes, a writer...compiling this beautiful novella.

Poetics of the Wor(l)ds We Live Essay

The below essay is a composition and an amalgamation of some of the world's greatest writers. We delve into the various ideologies of these authors, not only engaging their utterances but how those utterances are penned...as per the title perhaps, the 'poetics' and its 'worlds and words'.

It is various pieces that have been presented according to coherence.

Cain in this piece, Slowness has a unique sense of igniting and reviving our imaginations when it comes to absorbing literature. That, one can be so drawn into it, in the same manner, we engage meditation. It is a scenario that I would think most writers can relate to, well, I read to, especially as a loyal reader. You are "ushered" by the text into that state of meditation.

We are taught about the process of crafting the writing, and how, if so...do we consider or accommodate the 'audience' in the back of our minds when writing, how much value do we inject into 'access' with regards to the final production?

Cain piece touches on the concept of flexibility and fluidity, that perhaps, it is not advisable to try box writing or literature. I statement, I concur on the personal. The example of a 'political text' is used as demonstration. Indeed, how can one solely classify a text as 'political. That narration does not hold in the water because every story is political. No writer writes from an island where they have always lived alone!

Indeed, 'ideal literature' should always be 'socially aware'. However, one should not be excessive on the tone of being 'political' unless, of course, that is the premise. There should also be that liberty afforded to widen the imagination. Genres of fantasy for example, serve as examples for this. However, it seems Cain puts an unnecessary emphasis on the fact that it is okay to be 'not political' even though you are going to be political.

It is an unconscious engagement, I guess. Hence, we do have literature, whose content is political from onset.

Her work can be easily associated with Lauterbach...” Use this word in a Sentence:’
Experimental’

The connection of ‘experiment and experience’ is an interesting narration. This is something that captured my attention from onset. I would like to think that is the path, we as writers’ thread indeed. We border and are guided by these two concepts. We experiment with our writing...imagining from the experience we have. I am not certain, if I make sense here. But I can see and feel what I am trying to communicate across.

Ann touches on the fact that; she was introduced as an ‘experimental poet’. “...art is not sufficiently understood as a meaning-making structure which might provide a given culture with non-violent introduction to alternatives modes of thinking about our world and which, furthermore, might offer forms of redemption, solace, compensation and critique”. This long quote resonates with me as being very powerful. Indeed art, of which writing falls under...its contribution to better society is still being undermined or undervalued.

This is the gist of my capture from the piece. The other parts, I found to be ‘too technical’ on an unnecessary level. She has experimented too much with her imagination if there is such!

We therefore need to take our writing seriously until society’s eyes are open and begin to acknowledge their humongous contribution.

Getting deep into the poetics, Bernheimer...” Fairy tales is Form, Form is fairy-tale” has been another enjoyable piece to read. It speaks volumes. It is those titles that one can already formulate their own story without reading the piece or hope the piece of the writer aligns with the title. Some pieces disappoint the piece! Anyway

Opening with a great quote by Walter Benjamin, “the fairy-tale which to this day is the first tutor of children because it was once the first tutor of mankind, secretly lives on in the story. The first true storyteller is and will continue to be the teller of fairy-tale”.

I could not concur any further with the above quote. Fairy tales have played one of the biggest, if not the biggest source of information dissemination for generations, before being slowly eroded by play station and the manifestations of technology at large. Most lessons

were taught through fairy tales. Most levels of imaginations were ignited through fairy tales and most precious and treasured family moments were indulged in through fairy-tale time. It was a beautiful practice.

Clearly Kate shares the same sentiments on fairy-tale as the quote..." ever since I was a child, I have been happiest living in the sphere of a story, that itself is a fairy-tale". She states.

Kate mentions how critical it is to dismantle that myth of saying, fairy tales are only useful to writers of fantasy or fabulism! A ridiculous statement indeed, which is perhaps rooted in the miscomprehension of what fairy tales are. As Kate quotes Max Luthi, "The pleasure of fairy tales resides in their form. It is in the form the fairy-tale is presented that will measure the impact translated". The mission accomplished vibes. Just because fairy tales are fictitious, they are mostly based in reality. They are not fantasy...they are the experience of which now, is being experimented with to create or convey whatever form of caution or emphasis...whatever the desired intention via a particular form.

Fairy tales possess a particular technique to convey the message. Hence, a particular eye and focus to 'form' serves as imperative. Kate embodies the variety of philosophy fairy tales' embrace. For example, fabulists and writers who identify as realists. She further highlights a nice note on the association of fairy tales with women and children, with the nursery story and reckons that this has contributed to their under appreciation. This is a valid scenario that, when extended to the larger external world, makes sense.

She presents four elements intrinsic to fairy-tale namely: flatness, abstraction, intuitive logic and normalised magic. The utilisation of these concepts determines the form the fairy-tale takes and its effectiveness and impact. The importance of language is referred to... "the pleasure of language as it shapes the story." This is very important because in essence, it is the language used that shines or dulls the form which trickles down to the effectiveness of any piece of writing.

The funny thing about fairy tales is that, somehow there is always a part that one can relate to, on a very personal level which rebukes the myth that they are just fantasy! And when fairy tales are conveyed in a rich creative form, they become very poetic. They carry a rhythm as Lesego says his exposure to poetry started home with his grandmother.

Furthermore, Kate refers to something called "language poetry " which is a bit weird for me, for which poetry can ever exist without language? She aligns a critical point that, "...however

a continued underestimation of the techniques of fairy tales and their influence on hundreds of years of writing will lead, instead to their disappearance...”. The respect of the genre by its writers needs to be lifted high.

I relate to a lot of fairy-tale stories because I grew up hearing them. Even though my late grandmother was a ‘modern’ grandmother (not sure if that is a good or bad thing), as she never told any fairy tales by setting up that ideal scenario...my late grandfather would, in a blue moon, indulge us in such. Only when I went to other homes which were more ‘traditional’, would I be exposed to these lovely fairy tales and get to live by the perfect scene...gathering by the fire, listening to intsoni... sort of speak. That is an acquired timeless knowledge of which, to this day, I use when chatting with friends or posting on a social contemporary matter. I would quote intsoni for further clarity or articulation.

And, when writing fiction, I recognize the similarities.

It is ideal to tap into Okri...’Notes to a modern storyteller’

“The most sensational stories are not necessarily the ones that endure” ...” The greatness of a story is more in the telling than the tale. The true art resides in the nature of the telling, the way the story is freighted to the imagination...”

Okri touches on very critical points in his numbered piece, as demonstrated in the above opening quote. These ideologies have been alluded to in previous text. The gist of storytelling is in the telling which engages the use of form, which in turn engages the use of language...which is then, inevitably connected to igniting the level of imagination. You must see the picture currently being created in your head. In excellent storytelling, even hand gestures and body language are used. The narrator can turn into a cow or crawl or fly to changing voice tones! It becomes a live performance, setting on fire, the level of imagination.

The point about sensationalism and endurance is very true. Even outside the sphere of storytelling, just in the traditional sense. For example, a book, a ‘reality’ book, not fiction can have a hard time enduring simply because its content is not ‘popular’. Those are the unfavourable tactics of the publishing industry, of course!

“A fragment is more fascinating than the whole”. A very interesting statement for me. When applied to fairy tales, it makes more sense in favour of igniting the imagination. However, in

other genres, not so much so! I guess, the prerogative remains with the writer. For example, I am more of an 'explicit writer'. I like to pen it all, in black and white as I am listening to my internal voice of narration...therefore engaging more whole than fragment.

"Direct things bore us. Indirect things awaken us". A controversial statement which should be analysed grounded in conceptualization. A fluffy take can be misleading.

Tsvetaeva... 'Conditions of Creation'

The Tsvetaeva piece opens with an excellent statement "the condition of creation is a condition of entrancement. Till you begin- obsession, till you finish-possession. This is a journey I travel as a writer. There is a huge sense of attachment, therefore obsession to any piece birthed, like a mother to a child...hence the product becomes possession.

"The condition of creation is a condition of dreaming". Story formulation and narration occurs at a similar atmosphere. We refer to the power of imagination. The only difference is that, when dreaming, you are asleep, when imagining, you are awake.

Tsvetaeva touches on the critical concept of content. "I recognize the one I need by all the unrecognised ones". This borders on a personal note for me because, in some of my personal writings, I have followed this school of thought. I seek to unlock the closed doors as opposed to cheering the opened ones! This also applies to word selection.

I find it funny that Tsvetaeva has been bold enough to tell us "to understand is to accept..." personally, I can understand without accepting. Hence, we say, 'let us agree to disagree'!

It touches on a wishful thinking note, that of being 'deaf' to reality!

Judd is an excellent narrator of race matters. This is a very liberal piece which I relate to. She touches on previously engaged concepts of content. That as a writer, one cannot be constricted by issues of 'unpopular content' when they have recognized the need for the narration of that story and are ready to unlock the doors. You cannot write from an angle of fear and censorship. Your experience is your experiment! "Writing is attached to the body and all bodies are raced".

Judd raises the critical point of viewing her writing as a "larger project" which contributes to the betterment of society on a larger scale.

I like how she touches on the use of objects and observing your surroundings as these are some of the things covered in seminars. So, if we are encouraged to write about an object, why would we be discouraged to write about race which is an intrinsic part of the human being? The understanding and acceptance should be standard. In writing, we operate from the internal, though influenced by the external.

“I write about race for the same reason people write about God or nature or their mothers wedding dress”. As a writer, one cannot be silenced because that is the primary definition of a writer, a person who has decided NOT to be silent.

Lesego Rampolokeng & Ike Mboneni...interviewed by Robert Berold

A very interesting interview, especially Lesego. I understand every point raised through cynicism and sarcasm. He has managed to capture the realities writers face, focusing on ‘oral poetry’. There seems to be plenty of these words! What I refer to as ‘concept contradictory’ stuff. Too much classification. He talks about ‘oral poetry versus free styling’. These are one and the same.

He says we tend to celebrate mediocrity in this country...also discourages that notion of writing for the majority...which takes us back to that ‘unpopular content’ notion.

I love the emphasis on authenticity as a liberal writer. My voice...my form...my content...my theme...my style no matter how unpopular the content may be or how uncool my style may be. Running away from the ‘grammar grandma’ rules sort of speak.

Selasi introduces us in her piece...’Stop Pigeonholing African Writers’ posing three questions: Who is an African writer? What should the African writer write and for whom is the African writer writing. The piece basically tackles issues of identity and representation. The most essential part for me, is that, to some degree, it does question important misconceptions and serves to dismantle certain prominent stereotypes.

We have largely engaged these hindrances previously...hindrances which promote restriction and classification. This mainstream practice is disadvantageous to the African writer because it limits her liberties of expression, form and content. She argues that emphasis is set on the

level or measure of 'Africanness' as opposed to the piece of writing itself. It is as if the path of narration for the African writer is determined prior.

That said, the questions posed are almost as old as the story of the egg and chicken: which one came first! We must assume an angle of honesty when dealing with these questions because the biggest problem is that they are mainly approached from a fluffy angle. There is a lot of tip toeing accompanied by a lot of dismissal and denial.

Selasi makes the crucial point, which was made by Achebe, that an error occurred from onset when the meaning of 'African literature' was never properly established at inception.

Because this, then meant, anybody can just have a say on what it is! It is like a household with no rules...children do as they please. There was meant to be a solid fundamental definition by African writers...not the publishing industry or the system to define what it is.

Hence one writer does not want to be classified as an 'African writer' yet another one wants to be classified as an African writer because they believe this plays a role in their narration as it becomes located. There is also just a lot of unnecessary energy invested in politics of 'African this...African that...' which deviates from growing the actual 'African' writing! Sometimes, one must just write.

The other solution is to comprehend and distinguish between 'commercial politics and realistic politics. Be aware of the underlying agenda and seek to tackle the elephant in the room. The dialogues about 'African this ...African that' need to border right there as this shall deliver enlightenment and improve the writing.

Content is based on surroundings and environment. It is therefore not necessary to have things like, "you are writing poverty porn". I mean one can go as creative as they want with this notion, boxing every piece of writing! For example, 'you are writing capitalism porn...you are writing sexism porn...you are writing class porn... you are writing romance porn'. The list is endless. You cannot confine a whole piece of writing into one sarcastic sentence. That is rather a cheap analysis.

The concept of popular and unpopular are alluded to. Sometimes, I believe in writing for the audience in my head. The rest shall tag along.

In 'Rediscovery of the ordinary: Some New writings in South Africa' the piece opens directly in correlation with the previous one. There is a more settling tone to 'South African Literature as opposed to 'African Literature' because it is located. It is not a one broom sweeps all

carpet scenario. The horrendous reality suffered in the former regime is depicted nicely and clear. In this case, you cannot ‘porn’ one concept which substantiates my previous point.

The piece also takes us back to the very first piece of Cain where the issue of the political is engaged. The black writer in South Africa cannot or could not operate outside the spheres of the then, prevailing conditions of the regime. Because he was in the midst of it as its primary recipient. “T.T Moyana must have had this situation in mind when he pointed to the problematic relationship between art and objective reality in South Africa”.

The following quote supports my previous advocacy on fluffy absorption “...the almost deliberate waste of intellectual energy on trivialities...”. When tackling pieces like Selasi, we should avoid investing on trivialities.

This political South African literature capturing that era was necessary. I am not quite sure of the concept of ‘Protest Literature’ as I would have thought, such would already fall under ‘Political Literature...ok, which one came first! Anyway.

It is only ideal that one would have the keynote speaker at last. The magnificent Hooks, “Narratives of Struggle”. The title of this piece by legendary Hooks already aligns with the previous piece...that piece was in South Africa, however the narrative of the struggles is similar.

Hooks immediately touches on the issue of silence. One cannot be silenced as a writer and one should not be fearful as to articulate from an angle of authenticity. As Paul said in the seminar, all these writers say the same thing...just in different ways. I am at that point, where I feel like I am constantly repeating myself. The well is indeed one!

“being an intellectual does not separate or estrange me from this reality”. A beautiful line which I resonate with. Hence it is difficult to write outside of those personal realities.

Hooks' piece also touches on the critical point mentioned in fairy-tale writing, that is her writing has indeed served to better society.

She engages the issue of language. “...often language is the central field of contestation...”. The language used determines your audience, in a way and in some cases, it may even determine the class of the audience.

The concept of ‘pseudo-intellectual’ is a critical one. It is one Marechera engages, however, on a different wrong. All these hooks connect and ring the bell!

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Writing In Community Project

It was a very interesting experience and a beautiful engagement doing the writing in community project. On a personal level, I have always loved and love to engage and expose the community to the arts of the pen and paper.

The pleasure is alleviated to greater heights when engaging the children and learners. This is because, we live in a country with very low levels of reading and therefore writing. The above two are highly intertwined...one needs to read to be able to write and the more one writes, the more one reads.

I was fortunate to work with a high school group that belongs to an NGO. The NGO works with several township high school learners who are enrolled for getting extra academic assistance with their high school subjects. They have tutors whom the majority are university students who are willing to engage in community service and of course, receiving a stipend as the cost of living no longer affords 'voluntary' work, except for the rich who embark on it as a leisure.

Therefore, it remains no mystery to already be aware that this is a group of learners that are already willing to go the extra mile as it were, for their education. A group of learners that is self-driven and inspired enough to act towards crafting a better version of their future. It is a breath of fresh air exposure, particularly in a town where, the odds are against such progressive thinking. They loved the exercise very much.

We did two separate days to cover the two separate components, namely writing and reading.

The learners were most excited about the free writing experience. It was the very first time they had been exposed to this form of writing. They were initially shocked, and some were laughing ...finding the idea a bit ridiculous as I was explaining the rules of free writing. They could not comprehend of the fact that; they can just write 'disorderly' if we may! Especially because in school they are taught things like 'comprehension writing'...where they ought to design a structure and follow that structure to the T. This exercise was very liberating for them. It was like leaving town for the first time and going to a different place and realizing how other people do things differently. The travel effects!

The language issue came into play, that English is not their first language was a visible struggle. They battled with sentence construction. However, the great part was that this was free writing! they can write a word or term if they wanted. At that revelation, I could see the spark in the eyes of some as they realized, they can 'get away' with less writing. Because

with word or term use, there is no sentence or paragraph construction...no planning...no thinking. Just a matter of letting the pen flow and stop when it is time.

The other notion that excited these enthusiastic learners was the fact that, the writing does not have to make sense. I can still hear the giggles of their voices. “But how do you write if you won’t understand” one asked. She did not realize, that is precisely the gold of free writing. It is more about self-expression as the words or ideas pour into your head. The sense part will come later. And it does.

On the personal, one the lessons I took was the from some of the learners that wrote one words. I, myself had never been exposed to that. I learnt how meaning can be accumulated from mere consecutive word or term writing...in some instances, they had mixed terms. Of course, with the bear language grasp, some of them were not aware of the distinction between a word and a term. I was very happy to have taught them the distinction between the two.

When we did the second round of free writing, I observed the greater confidence that was accumulated. They were more comfortable, and it was in this round, that I gathered more sentence construction. There were more sentence and even some paragraphs. I had set the time at 15 minutes this round. This was to also accommodate the language issue as these kids must translate their thoughts into English as well. The atmosphere was certainly more relaxed. One of them even said “Sane, can you be our English teacher please”. It was a heart-warming request, of course.

Some examples

“To go to school hungry. Baby cries. No key at gate. Neighbour making noise”

“Sad. Exams. Cape town. My sister. Bad dream. Maths is hard. I want to pass. I don’t like to be poor. Nice staying in town”

“I like the Kadashain show when I grow up, I want to be in that show but my own show. My mother said I need to have money. I don’t know if I am going to have money from school. Maybe if I go to jozi. I will have money. But I am scared of the tsotsiz there”.

“period pains. I don’t like to be a girl. I wish I was a boy with many girlfriends, and they fight for me”

It was interesting to digest and expand on some of these writings, especially after seeing the faces from which they came from. I could somehow connect the writing to the learner simply

based on their aura. The societal and economic realities were displayed and communicated through a simple exercise of free writing which just goes to show the power of writing. That individual power that one gets to own when holding the pen or in the contemporary world of typing.

The learners wanted yet another round of free writing but of course, I could not grant as we had to move to the reading journey, the following day.

The following day was the reading session. It was nice to meet my familiar group again...some even hugged me which was very nice. I started by emphasizing to them, the critical importance of reading and how reading can take them anywhere they want to go. Through asking various questions, realized yet again, how the school does not provide sufficient platform for the culture of reading. But also, sadly, how most of these children come from families whose environments are not conducive for reading.

But as mentioned, this is the fighting group...the determined group so they are pushing to fight the odds and always following any spark of light available. They have a willing ear to listen.

I read a piece of my work. I also selected a random extract from a piece I had read. I explained by decomposing the longer piece I had read to them. It interesting to observe that, they somehow enjoyed or related better to the piece that was my original work as opposed to the other. I suppose because they felt like, they 'know' the person sort of speak.

There were more questions asked on my piece than the other piece. I had chosen a simple piece with simple English so as to accommodate them. I thoroughly enjoyed having this public platform of learners to read my work. It taught me to be pace conscious, my poetics and rhythm had to be proper so that they were not lost. It was a very disciplined and contained public reading of my work.

The mood was uplifting...the engagement was on par and the interaction was beyond progressive. I randomly selected a few learners to come forward and read the piece individually.

I must, I was extremely impressed by their baby reading capacity and word pronunciation. They took me by surprise.

To close the session, I requested, we ALL read together. Oh, what a beautiful closing session. I could see other learners peeping through the windows as they heard the noise because the voices were high up in unison.

Writing in Community was a bliss.

Book Reviews

The Lover

Marguerite Duras

This is a very famously discussed book in the sphere of broadly exposed writers. It is a sensational book that directs or forces one to absorb from an emotional angle. It is heavily loaded with certain social concepts, mainly from a point of sorrow and disgust... which therefore evokes a lot of questioning and perhaps, sympathy from the reader.

The author engages certain issues which can be categorized as following. She engages issues of feminism, the struggles, socially oriented expectations of women and young women in general...that socially, system driven demonic practice that women are 'women before human'. The main character, at that tender age is saved from her situation, simply because, the 'saver' capitalized on her sex! Not only that but defying the law as she is underage.

Duras does a beautiful job at making us travel to that atmosphere and era of war. She engages the politics of race and class, in a very mild manner, yet extremely so loud. This is of course part of the battles or rather hindrances the lover and main character had to endure and overcome.

The other concept engaged is the family concept. This family is so disorganized, dis-oriented and disconnected but somehow connected! They have bitter-sweet relations of love. It could be described as dis-functional! Yet, again, she does a good point of presenting that scenario which makes one to put it in the contemporary. The stance is familiarized and relatable.

The sensual and sexuality and diversity and vulnerability when it comes to sex is beautifully presented. There is a scene she describes of Helene Lagonelle where the main character sees her lying as was born... '...Helene is the mate of the bondsman who gives me such abstract,

such harsh pleasure...”. ‘such harsh pleasure’, an explicit sensual moment, Duras depicts the sight of gazing at pleasure...and dissecting pleasure.... of absorbing pleasure! At this moment, Duras perhaps reveals to the reader what ‘makes this girl tick’ sort of speak.

She maintains, perhaps a different style of writing, in the sense that, she takes the reader back and forth! The brother or mother is not dead when you read, they were! For example. The book is themed around that poetic and musical rhythm of ‘the revolving door’!

However, the main character and the man from Cholon, the rich man, Duras presents us with ambiguity! It is left to the reader to either paint that pain as manipulative and selfish or as genuinely a soul that was desperate and seeking warmth, comfort and love...of which could be substantiated by the fact that, the relationship between him and his father is not demonstrated as strong. Then, we consider the racial reality. He is presented as sincere according to Duras. It is an unfortunate love narration...out of time, age, class and race! The politics!

The book is beautifully written. It is very clear. It carries no bombastic wording...which is a good thing in terms of information dissemination.it makes one travel to certain spaces. It makes one dream of certain spaces. It makes one regret certain spaces. It makes one wonder about certain spaces. It makes one enjoy a read!

It is a must read.

A Working Woman

Elvira Navarro

Translated by

Christina McSweeney

This book is a very interesting piece, written in a manner that affords one the assumption that its translation is on point. This Christina does by putting in brackets her own thoughts and interpretation of Elvira. A nice personal involvement into the narration. Though some would deem unnecessary.

We can clearly see the main character suffers from a lot of mental issues. It is great how this mental illness, is somehow told in a manner that is not disastrous...as much as is and mental illness is generally treated. This terrible state is somehow normalized. The main character has manifested a mechanism to function normally as 'unnatural' as she is. She manages to fuse her mental disorder into her daily existence. It is almost similar to a functional alcoholic, if you may.

The book covers a few imperative unfortunes about life and the world in general. We shall classify them under the following.

Women Inferiority issues

Challenges faced by Writers

Mental Illness

Power Struggles

Purpose of Life

The Greater Misery of Life

The main character displays a very low self-esteem. She is extremely unhappy about her physique, otherwise, why mention it! She does not consider self to be beautiful. One supposes, she measures her being according to what the system presents and expects of women's beauty standards. In this sense, she is a weakling. She envies being a size 22 and all that jazz! This mindset is well communicated from her views and description and engagement of her housemate. She judges her roommate very well, simply based on her bodily features and way of dressing.

The book touches on the real struggles faced by writers. The fact that, this art is generally undervalued. A few writers get to be 'rich' as it were...unless their work makes it to the mainstream system domain! Your 'Harry Potter' presentation if we may. She battles with being compensated for her work, and she does work as she is passionate about the art. She is not paid on time or paid at all which results in her living from hand to mouth.

The mental issue is a great lesson. At some point, the main character is living like a sleepwalker. Her levels of cognisance are doomed. However, she masters this chaos very well because she is very much detached from the world. Nothing is emotional at her core being. She is a victim of prescriptions.

the failure of medical practice regarding mental illness is conveyed very clearly yet in a subtle manner. Why do these shrink and psychologists always just present prescription instead of diving into the elephant in the room? They practice a ‘one broom sweeps all’ principle. It is a refreshing moment when the main character meets a shrink that gets personal with her, a more human and caring engagement. For example, he instructs her to pen her thoughts down...an exercise she does very nice but never submits the good piece.

Elvira also engages us with the power struggles. We see the main character battling to engage her boss until that breakthrough moment when the boss relates her airport story. For the first time, the main character is exposed to a piece of her boss on a personal level. This clears her subconscious belief that her boss did not like her very much because she is always heard her talk with other colleagues but never her.

The purpose of our existence is a matter of critical engagement. In this book, we are presented with a lot of ambiguity. Both main character and roommate, it would seem, they have not quite figured why they are here. The endless continuous search for purpose, the average human being suffers from.

This in turn breeds into the greater misery of our lives. If that search is not eventually confined and figured, one shall lead a life a misery.

The book is a good piece to read...well written...jumps from scenario to scenario. You must keep up with the pace. It is almost written in a manner that depicts the mental imbalances of the main character. The pace and rhythm are on par.

The main character is a sexual explorer! She has what some would describe as ‘absurd’ sexual fantasies...like fucking on your periods, full moon with a stranger. The sexual fantasies revoke the standardized ‘normal’ ways of sexual engagement because, Fabio, the dwarf is a homosexual, yet they fuck.

Married Love and other stories

By

Tessa Hadley

A book of short story compilation, Hadley remains consisted with her style of writing, narration and subtle presentation throughout the various short stories. We cannot review all the stories read, only a selection of three which carry different energies if you may.

Married Love, the author has done a wonderful job, presenting intricate sarcastic misery and sorrow in a humorous manner. The story presents us with very realistic life's sadness's, however dodging the bullet of alert and gloominess. It is a lesson conveyor kind of short story.

The main character, Lottie who insists on getting married at the tender age of nineteen, to a man twice her senior...rebellling against the wishes and advice of her parents would sound Ludacris! Hence her mother does not even bother attending the little wedding congregation.

Hadley does a nice job at probing the reader. Her presentation is very familiar in the sense that, all the characters are your next-door girl vibes.

In a blink of an eye, Lottie managers to commit her life to the pits! She signs up for suffocation. Their tiny flat was submerged under packs of disposable nappies, cots, toys, washing, nursing bras and breast pads, a playpen, books on babies and books about babies" writes Hadley. The above scenario already gives some the creeps. Of course, some would regard this a normal for most people.

The piece is freshly written, authentic style and organized narration. It is a dry and dull piece...its light being subtle presented in between the lines. The story has that power to probe into one's emotions...somehow forcing one to be emotionally involved.

Hadley also evokes some basic human questions about love, marriage, kids and the idea of working...basically, the things that are expected of the average human being. Regardless of the reality that, they bring misery..." I am grey, she complained- My life's grey". Who culminates a grey life for self!

The title is also interesting, as it would seem, she married love indeed...the word love and perhaps its ideal expectations and representation...ALONE without its package.

It is a loveless marriage, once again, a usual normality for most marriages today.

An interesting piece to read.

The God Children presents a dry short story but dodged the bullet of qualifying it as dry because she presents precise personal detail. It carries that powerful way of taking one down

memory lane, childhood memory lane. All the characters are equally represented in their uniqueness and dysfunctionality.

Hadley covers basic life scenarios. Amanda, free spirit, childless with 'lots of boyfriends'...Chris, the less involved father in his nine-year old's life and Susan, with two kids. All three of them share one thing in common: They cannot hold a straight relationship.

All in all, one would not miss out on much for not having read this piece. The title is very fluffy with regards to content narration. The piece is written in a very lazy tone which also affords one a very lazy review!

Pretending is an exquisitely beautiful piece by Hadley. She embarks on an exceptional skill of presentation. It is unique and very enjoyable to read. She covers the horrific socio-political, class struggles, sexism and stereotypes unfortunes in a mild manner.

The main character, Roxanne. It is like everybody knows a Roxanne in their lives if they are not a Roxanne or have not been a Roxanne. It is a very painful touching piece, highlighting the evils of human beings which have been normalized.

A simple excellent style of writing, the less is more pattern. These five paged pieces carries the volume of an entire book. The narration of the story is beautiful.

It is a highly recommended must read.

All My Goodbyes

By

Mariana Dimopulos

Translated

by

Alice Whitmore

The book as per title does make one feel like saying goodbye to reading it! However due to curiosity and hope for those who possess the love for reading, one goes on, awaiting a pick-up moment. Profound moment would be too much to expect at this rate. I have never struggled so much to finish a book.

The storyline is as nomadic as the main character is in the piece. It is scattered all over with no fundamental guiding structure. It is like a house occupied by rebellious teenagers...no direction and no focus. The fact that, it is a translation adds to the confusion as one might assume, maybe the original version is better because it is authentic. We cannot overlook the power of language in presentation of a piece. This is because it carries the poetics and rhythm of the piece. Therefore, those critical aspects can be lost in translation.

It is wonderful how she manages to vividly make the reader travel with her through all these places, some very random through the presentation of a very clear peculiar analysis of every place. She is very detailed in capturing her surroundings or environment. She is also very impulsive with regards to all her goodbyes. They are never planned. They occur as a spare of the moment thing...like randomly getting on a midnight train to Georgia sort of speak.

The narration presents a lot of detail also when it comes to some of the characters. This is a kind of detail, which to some might feel unnecessary or overload. The piece lacks a sense of commitment to the reader.

There are however some laughable lines which could even be classified as sarcastic! And some are thought provoking lines... 'intelligent lines' as it were. Most of these come from the father who is a scientist. He is a very interesting character, the one that triggers some curiosity from the reader to want to find out more about him. The father sparks a bit of light in this dull piece. "Rest is a form of movement". A very simple yet powerful line. A view or conceptualization that cannot be just arrived at, by anyone in today's society. This is not necessarily because he is a scientist. In fact, this is more of a social science's view. Some might reckon or I reckon.

It is also a very loveless piece. Be it heterosexual or homosexual love. There are no concrete feelings. The people feel a bit robotic in their encounters. These are scenes where more detail would be ideal, but we are deprived of it. Either by the writer or translator. The narration shies away from exploring moments of interest if you may.

“What could be more miserable than believing in God? And yet, when I saw the blood-spattered arm, I began to pray that God existed, even though there was nobody there to witness it”. A bit of a generalized loose statement bordering on a serious concept which could be offensive to Christian subscribers. It is the freedom of speech line, we suppose.

All in all, the piece just bounces back and forth ...from scenario to scenario as if in search of its own destiny. The writing is beautiful though. It is very clear and simply. It follows the common standards of punctuation. There is this smooth silent flow carried by the style of writing. It resonates with the sea waves when they are at peace! No tides.

That said, the book uses a very interesting structure of the returns. There are cycles of return. The narrative mirrors the story lines...the narrative form of the storyline. The voice operates strongly to arrive at the fact that, there is no ‘proper’ narration as it were. The narrator exhibits high levels of instability in terms of ever settling with anything. It is in way, a unique peculiar stylistic form of writing which presents the reader with confusion to digest the story. As they say, there are many ways to kill a cat.

It is a bit of a dismantled piece when it comes to the fragments of the characters. Otherwise, the piece would not be a recommendation. In fact, it is a good Christmas gift for that mother-in-law!

