

THE BEAT

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Of

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By

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ABSTRACT

My play script is a docu-drama inspired by the 1950s *Drum* journalists: Can Themba, Bloke Modisane, Nat Nakasa, Henry Nxumalo, Lewis Nkosi, Peter Magubane, Casey Motsitsi and Todd Matshikiza. The setting is a Sophiatown shebeen through which the characters move in and out. The central dramatic exploration hinges on female characters' experiences rather than the perspectives of the male journalists connected to them. I dramatise documented events such as Modisane's wife leaving him and taking their daughter with her, or a woman who buried her lover's body after he was beaten and stabbed to death. There are other twists and turns based on the *Drum* journalists writings. I play with the seriousness of politics, love affairs, and the comedy of their daily lives. My influences come from plays such as *Nongogo* (1959) and *Sophiatown* (1986).



The Beat is dedicated to all the women who have been silenced and as a result became products of their consequences. Their voices remind me as a theatre maker that my poems and plays might arrive in me as pure SONGS (Dipina) or a CRY (Kodiyamalla). Sometimes their inspiration will spring from my traditional family rituals, as a PRAISE song/s (Dithoko/ Thoko), or from a simple memory of a childhood church song, a HYMN (Difela/ Sefela). At times these words will present themselves as a source of where one comes from, CLAN NAMES (Seboko/ Poko).

These stories will find me in the dusty streets of my village and township HERSTORY... they will touch, move, provoke, push and force me to vomit on page words that are subjects of that which we are even when silence seems inevitable.

PREFACE

The Beat is a play, which is prefaced by number of quotations and writing from books, articles and journals based on the real *Drum* journalists. My inspiration was also drawn from number of plays and classical *Drum* archives. Thus along the journey of developing and finding my different characters I constantly quoted, re-worked and used real voices of the real people. Below are sources of some of my words, lines, dialogues, monologues and poems from those points of references:

- *Blame Me on History:* William Bloke Modisane
- *The Beat Goes On (Drum 60):* Compiled & edited by Jurgen Schaderberg
- *Come Back:* Fourteen Short Stories From South Africa
- *Shophiatown Renaissance:* Reader Real (ed.) Ntongela Masilela
- The Fifties People of SOUTH AFRICA:
- *With The Lid Off:* Todd Matshikiza & John Matshikiza
- *Sophiatown:* Junction Avenue Theatre Company
- *Crepuscule:* Khayelihle Dom Gumede
- Drum Magazine Archives: (Copies) UKZN Library
- Drum's HALL OF FAME
- *Drum Magazine (1951- 1961)* and works of black South African writes associated with it: David Rabkin
- *The Drum Decade (Stories From 1950's):* Edited by Michael Chapman

Photography:

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THE BEAT SONGS LIST:

Some of the songs in the play I composed myself. Some are traditional songs that were composed by the whole community as a result they belong to everyone.

However, some songs I have specifically used here are credited below:

<i>Syncopation</i> -	Napo Masheane
<i>Kena Le Modisa</i> -	Hymn
<i>King Kong!</i> -	Todd Matshikiza
<i>Indlela</i> -	Harry Belafonte & Mirriam Makeba
<i>Back Of The Moon</i> -	Mirriam Makeba
<i>Babalazi</i> -	Mirriam Makeba
<i>We are Marching</i> -	School Song
<i>Jerusalem</i> -	William Blake
<i>Lefatshe Lena</i> -	HHP
<i>I'nto Yami</i> -	Dolly Rathebe
<i>Unomeva</i> -	Dorothy Masuka
<i>Mhlaba Wethu</i> -	Communal Song
<i>Suffer</i> -	Napo Masheane

CHARACTERS

NOLO: (Narrator)

She is a 16-year-old schoolgirl and the only child of Dolly who runs a local shebeen (a melting pot for all *Drum* magazine intellectuals) in Sophiatown. Nolo is intelligent, confident, very opinionated and has a strong love for poetry.

DOLLY: (Shebeen Owner)

She is a well-built beautiful 35-year-old woman, who is a well-respected and dedicated shebeen owner. She came to Johannesburg (City of Gold) with her miner (dump Basotho gangster) husband, to find fortune in the early 1950's. Presently her husband is in jail serving a term for beating a man to death.

KALAMAZOO: Kala (Music Manager/ Dolly's brother in law)

He is a 24-year-old school drop out now turned Musa's music manager and boyfriend. He is ruthlessly, ambitious, impulsive, insecure, and will do anything for money.

ABIGAIL: (Local Shoplifter)

She is a 30-year-old huge, streetwise dark woman who is renting one of the back rooms at Dolly's shebeen. She is a straightforward township woman; often speaks broken English with a twist of *tsotsitaal* and known to be one of the fearless professional shoplifters in Sof'town.

MUSA: (A character based on Dorothy Masuka/ Thandie Klaasen)

Musa is a 19-year-old, shy and gifted singer, who performs in every Sophiatown nightclub/joint. She is Kalamazoo's live in girlfriend and close to Dolly and Nolo.

BLOKE: (Character based on Bloke Modisane)

Bloke is a well-built 25-year-old man and one of the *Drum* Magazine journalists. He is married to Fiki and has a child with her.

CAN: (Character based on Can Themba)

Can is a 28-year-old editor of *Drum* Magazine and is also renting one of the back rooms at Dolly's shebeen. He often refers to Dolly's house as the '*House of Truth*'... frequented and used by his friends as a place where they can speak nothing but the truth.

CASEY: Kid (Character based on Casey Motsitsi)

Casey 'Kid' is 18-year-old boy who writes mainly about Jo'burg shebeen life with humour, pathos and an awareness of the irony of situations in the world. He is very fond of Nolo.

NADIA: (Character based on Sharon Davis)

Nadia is a white 25-year-old woman, who is a columnist at *Drum* and a socialite. Like her male colleagues, she became politically active after being fascinated by Sof'town life.

FIKI: (A character based on Bloke Modisane's wife)

Fiki is a 25-year-old woman who is married to Bloke.

CAMEO ROLES: (They can be played by other actors)

Van der Merver: (Police Constable)

White Magistrate: (Charge Office Judge)

Clerk (Extra character in court)

Police (Two characters)

SCENE ONE



It's a shebeen's main drinking room in Sophiatown, lit by an uncertain paraffin lamp in one corner with few tables full of bottles and glasses. There is also a wobbly room divider turned wardrobe, with piles of clothes and boxes on top of it. In another corner there are crates stacked on each other.

There are three visible doors, one is the main entrance from the street and the back yard (seen), the centre stage door leads onto the kitchen, with the third one leading into the bedroom (unseen). Lights pick up on NOLO.

NOLO: I was in a corner, the only little girl, with *bo-malome* [uncles] and *bo-mamane* [aunties] on either side. The room was packed with: Todd [Matshikiza's] humming some tunes, Henry [Nxumalo] wandering outside, Nat [Nakasa] quietly writing nonstop, Bloke [Modisane] in the other corner figuring out who is who... and my Casey... I mean Casey [Motsitsi] keeping himself busy with the bugs. Right next to me there was *mamane* Abigail making sure I was safe. Whilst, Musa was looking happy and lost at the same time. Then came in *malome* Can [Themba], our host, holding a fake microphone, flitting lightly around the room. We had been sitting for an hour in this deep, brooding African silence, gazing in front of us without expression or expectation.

Can, the master of ceremonies; climbs on top of a crate; his slender body quivering with energy, as if compelled by some electric shock.



CAN: Ladies and gentlemen! Let me present to you, a woman who was once Africa's greatest music star, the irresistible, incomparable, indescribable one and only, DOLLY! *(Long pause)* Nolo, stop writing and bring me my academic gown.

Nolo hands Can his gown from the wobbly room divider.

NOLO: Your own *Bachelor of Arts* gown from Fort Hare, *malome* Master Can.

CAN: *(Confidant authority)* Again I announce, the one and only Dolly, Baby.

Everyone stare up at him with looks of skepticism. Dolly is not there.

ABIGAIL: *(Breaking the silence)* Can, she gone bored! Ha! Ha! Ha!

MUSA: I am not sure that's funny, Abigail.

ABIGAIL: Okay! *Hade* [Sorry]... Dolly benched that-a-way!

CAN: Can someone go fetch her, man! *Voetsak!* [Shit]!

ABIGAIL: *Bricate*, chill. *(To the audience)* Ladies and gentlemen, Dolly will be among us very shortly.

Dolly appears at the doorway

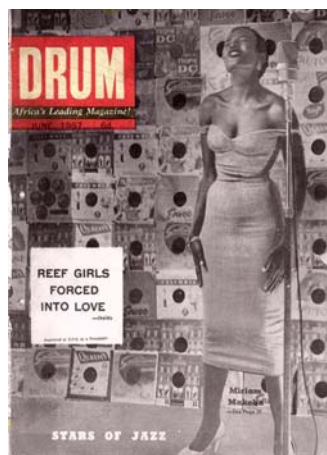
NOLO: Sure enough, just then, my mother appeared. She had an instant effect on the crowd. She was like the most famous African woman in the whole continent.

ABIGAIL: Jeeer! Dolly was famous... very blind. Her face was mirrored on hoardings, in bioscopes, and in *Drum*: She sang in white night clubs and made records with all- *Majimbos* [gents], which sold all over.

NOLO: And now?

ABIGAIL: *(Voice drops)* Well that was before her path zigzagged with your father.

Dolly takes to the centre stage and starts singing.



Unomeva (Welcome Duru)

N'digo enzane

O'mobe kangaga x2

Bah! Bah! Bah! Bah!

NOLO: There she was, my Dolly, in the doorway of our small house in Sophiatown. Looking very beautiful, in her exotic way. She wore a low cut black dress. Her brown shoulders and head emerging

like a sculpted bust, hewn and rounded and polished from soft brown stone. Her thick black hair, gathered round with beads that stood up severely from her forehead...

Walele u'mtwana

Ngathi unomeva

Iyo! Iyo! Iyo!

I'tolofia

MUSA: Beautiful... she held herself erect on her high- heeled shoes. Like a statue... fearless with the disdain of a *grande dame*, poised with an unshakeable dignity in these undignified surroundings. Unspoilt, unprotected, among her people. Her voice made my body boil. *(Beat)* Nolo... Abigail I need to be on stage with her or hit the dance floor.

Musa goes to sing next to Dolly.

ABIGAIL: Musa, don't mess up your *shwang-sheng* [beautiful hair style].

CAN: Dolly, girl! There's my Dolly Baby!

BLOKE: Doll-Doll!

DOLLY: Did you boys want to see me? *(Giggling)*



BLOKE: Ja! Sure things!

CAN: True's God! Dolly, please sing your truth.

NOLO: *(Dramatic)* THEN... She opened her mouth wide. Her big lips quivered as she ruptured into another song...

I'nto yami

I'nto yami

Ngi ya ithanda

Nomi 'seli u 'tshwala

I'yangi sebenzela

I'xhaki a'yikho

Ee Ma Yeee! X 2

NOLO: ... the stone-faced figures round the room sprang to life like puppets lifted off their perch. They wailed the accompaniment, which zigzagged through the tune, blowing imaginary trombones and twanging non-existent guitars...



Angi khathale

Ngo khuthe

Isono zami

NOLO: ... I sat in my corner, watching this mass of dancing bodies. Everything changed. The green peeling walls seemed insubstantial, swaying in time with the music. Wall pictures in their frames took on a new expression of tolerance and sympathy. The room became

vast, its sharp right angles vague and distant. The jivers seemed not solid.

*Walele u'mtwna
Ngathi unomeva
Iyo! Iyo! Iyo! I'tolofia*

CAN: Gentlemen...

ABIGAIL: And the *mataras* [ladies]...

CAN: Of course... of course (*Beat*) I have the honour tonight to name this palace the '*House of Truth!*'

ALL: Truth! The House of Truth!

More singing along, cheering and clapping and cries filled the room.

NOLO: *Mamane* Abigail, why is it called the *House of Truth?*

ABIGAIL: It's a long tale.

NOLO: I have all night.

ABIGAIL: You see ... every *chaf bozi* [backroom] in Sophiatown has to have a name. Bloke *o bloma* [stays] in the House of Commons; Nat hides in the House of Saints. But this place is very special; everyone in this house "CAN" speak the truth.

KALAMAZOO enters the sheeben and sees Musa jiving and singing on the floor.

ABIGAIL: Tjo Tjo Tjooo! The smell of trouble has landed.

Lights pick on Musa on the dance floor.

MUSA: So here I was busy singing along with Dolly and dancing

ecstatically with this other man. I mean the music was electrifying. I couldn't stand still, so I keep pulling my dancing partner nearer... we were twisting and jiving, and had not noticed Kala. (*Jiving.*) It was only when my dance partner jumped off that I met Kala's blazing eyes.

ABIGAIL: And the *moegoe* [*fool*] gave you a hot clap.

Musa starts to bleed from the nose.

NOLO: Tjoooo! Suddenly the singing, the jiving and clapping stops. (*Irritated*) *malome* Kala knows how just to spoil a night.

Musa runs out.

DOLLY: Musa, Are you all right? (*To Kalamazoo*) *Voetsek!* Kala...

KALAMAZOO: Leave her alone!

ABIGAIL: Zoo... *Autie* [man], can I criss-cross words with you by *die hoek*?

KALAMAZOO: *Votsek!* Can't you see I am busy?

Kalamazoo goes after Musa but quickly walks back in a house.

ABIGAIL: Oho! You want to talk now? *Ara* [watch out] Zoo...

KALAMAZOO: Police! Police! POLICE!

Dolly switches the light off. Abigail drains her glass and put a bottle of brandy under a floorboard. Can, radiating respectability walks slowly towards the door. Everyone jumps to follow him through the outside yard and vanish. Only Nolo and Dolly are left. Complete silence is followed by a huge bang at the door. BANG! BANG! BANG!

DOLLY: Who is it?

POLICE: POLICE! Open the door.

DOLLY: *(Whispering)* They are raiding and ransacking the area.

NOLO: *(Frightened)* Mama don't open.

DOLLY: Ssssh! Be quite Nolo and stay where I can see you.

Dolly opens the door. One police officer VAN DER MERWE who seems more familiar with her shebeen walks in.

VAN DER MERWE: Where are they?

DOLLY: *Bomang, Ntate* [Who]?

Van der Merwe directs other police officers to search the place.

VAN DER MERWE: EVERYONE.

DOLLY: I don't know who you talking about, strueee.

NOLO: They just went pass through...

DOLLY: Quite, Nolo.

VAN DER MERWE: And the girl?

DOLLY: Which girl, Nolo?

VAN DER MERWE: *(Intimidating)* Don't be too smart. You are hiding her. I heard the noise as far as Gerty Street.

DOLLY: We had church earlier on, Constable.

VAN DER MERWE: And this mess you got here? Was it a liquor church? You are doing your parties without inviting me again. You are hurting my ego.

Van der Merwe and the boys inspect the house and find nothing.

VAN DER MERWE: You are off the hook today. Thank your African ancestors that we did not find that thug of a girl or those *Drum* boys.

DOLLY: Thug of a girl... you mean, Abigail?

VAN DER MERWE: Mmmm! That's her name. Tell her I will catch her one day.

DOLLY: *Feela* [But] I have not seen her in days.

VAN DER MERWE: Still, tell her she is going to look like she has been through a meat- grinder when I am through with her.

Van der Merwe orders the rest of his police boys to leave Dolly's house. Lights focus on Nolo.

NOLO: I often taste the smell of police in my mother's house and always pray they don't take her away from me, like they did my father. But my mother has learned to be calm and seems to know her way around the huge police constable.

SCENE TWO

The police dogs and sirens fade away. Distant thunder can now be heard. The rain starts falling; Abigail walks back soaking wet from the rain. Dolly tries to switch the lights up.

ABIGAIL: (Concern) Dolly, don't put the lights up. What if the *gatas* [Police] are still out there.

DOLLY: For fuck's sake this is my house and I can't see where I am going.

ABIGAIL: O'right, let me view if the coast is clear first. (*Looks through the window*) Sure... sure thing they vanished.

Nolo goes to the drawer, brings out a candle and places it on top of the table. By now a single candle is lit and throws shadows on the wall.

ABIGAIL: *Maar* [but], what is Van der Merwe's *kwaai* [issue]?

DOLLY: *O nahana eng?* [What do you think] (*Long pause*)

ABIGAIL: (*Change of tone*) Dolly... can you feel it? It's raining dogs and rats out there.

NOLO: More like cats and dogs, *mamane* [auntie].

DOLLY: And bullets — I tell you girls it has started. Only yesterday over the street facing the father Huddleston church, a huge communal housing, accommodating thirty-two families was vacated. Only walls with the gaping wounds remain. (*Pause*) I need to clean before clients come back.

Dolly begins to clear empty beer bottles, cigarettes and glasses off the tables.

ABIGAIL: Ja! It's late too much; soon the *tsotsis* and their *mataras* [girlfriends] will be flooding back in again... to show off us their stolen flowing wealth.

DOLLY: Not that there is any rent money flowing from you, Abigail.

ABIGAIL: No jive, Dolly —

NOLO: With all the rain outside I wonder where Musa is?

ABIGAIL: *Kak!* You should be checking, why is Musa with that *bari* [fool]? She can catch love better with someone.

NOLO: *Malome*, Kala wont allow her to be court by any...

DOLLY: *Wena* [you] Nolo; shouldn't you be preparing yourself for school?

NOLO: I should.

DOLLY: (*Worried*) They are trying to move us far away from the city.

ABIGAIL: For *kak* sake... This country already smells like the ugly scab of *pondokkies* [shacks]. That's why you want to read hard, Nolo so you can *kutsa* [to duck] out of this bush.

NOLO: What bush?

ABIGAIL: The one you would be ducking curfew laws from top to bottom.

DOLLY: Yes! The one where we sometimes forget that we are the colour pieces of a colourful society, inflicted festering sores on each other... rehearsing our roles, arranging and dividing ourselves into the colour groups determined by our society.

(*Frantically mopping.*) They are going to mop us clean.

ABIGAIL: This is *al chandis*; they are going to adjust us out of our *chaf bozi's* [homes] nxa! (*Beat*) O'right! I can't stay this depressed... I thirst for beer... the only safe place for a drink is in the stomach.

NOLO: Mama who are THEY?

DOLLY: THEY... my child, are those that made men like your father beat these streets pillars like rock falls in those mines. Rockfall sounds that leave any black man wondering why another man's life is worth keeping.

NOLO: I wonder what would have happened if he was here. The police wouldn't dare give us sleepless nights, neh, mama?!

DOLLY: All I know is I am tired of Van der Merwe and his boys. I have to find a way to stop *mathaithai a bona* [his tricks].

NOLO: How are you going to do that? Don't the colour of their skins place them above us?

DOLLY: *Thula wena!* [quiet] fix your mind on preparing yourself for school. Leave worldly politics to us adults. Now off you go young lady.

NOLO: (*Softly*) Will he ever come back mama?

DOLLY: Van der Merwe?

NOLO: No! I mean my Papa. Will they ever let him out?

DOLLY: You mean in our lifetime? *Ha ke tsebe.* [I don't know]

Dolly stands up and exits to the kitchen. Abigail is drinking, lost in the corner, as the spot light pick up on Nolo.

NOLO: She would say this all the time when I asked her about my father 'You mean in our life time?' But they always seem to come back to Jo'burg as many have done a thousand times. Fed up and sick with weariness from this soulless city of gold ... caught in its rush, scurry of feet and faces pressed against its hate.

We hear a soft marabi music playing from a distant.

ABIGAIL: Whether they find it *mcaaa* [good] or not. This is our pozi... our church... our *gontjie* [home] our Jerusalem... even drops of rains and the shebeen mass will never allow us to forget it.

SCENE THREE

The following morning: The shebeen door opens Kalamazoo walks in followed by Musa carrying a small brown paper bag, which they put on top of the table. Kalamazoo takes the brown bag from Musa.

KALAMAZOO: The *Sangoma* [traditional healer] said the big dark bottle with the black liquid and the green herbs will complete the work.

MUSA: *(Not looking well) ... Mmmm! (Coughing)*

KALAMAZOO: Remember to boil the liquid first on the Primus stove and then...oho! There is also this small red bottle. So you mix what is inside the black bottle with what is inside the red one so they are more effective. Then rub your stomach with the Vaseline to cover marks.

MUSA: Would I really have to drink all this Kala?

KALAMAZOO: *(Ignoring her)* As far as I am concern, the black one is to drive *Baloi* [witches] away.

MUSA: The green herbs?

KALAMAZOO: If we burn *Mpepho* before we sleep, it will make the witches of this location to run before they start with their midnight business.

MUSA: If I burn it Sis Dolly will smell it.

KALAMAZOO: Tell her it is to boost my business.

MUSA: Being a thug... I mean music manager is not a business.

Dolly shouts from her bedroom.

DOLLY: *Ke mang ka moo?* [Who is there this time of the night]

KALAMAZOO: *(Whispering)* Don't start with me, Musa.

*Kalamazoo immediately gets Musa to clear the brown bag and the bottles away.
Dolly enters in her morning gown.*

DOLLY: Speak or I call my boys to deal with you. *(Beat)* *Bathong!* For Christ sake Kala and Musa why you two have to creep in so early like this? What's going on...?

KALAMAZOO: We are sorry Sis Dolly. We stayed up till late from a performance at another joint. It was really packed and nice, so—

DOLLY: I don't care about your show... just don't come through the house if you arrive this early, *tog*. Rather go straight to your back room.

KALAMAZOO: *(To Musa)* Ask her for it.

MUSA: For what?

KALAMAZOO: Primus stove.

MUSA: *(Doubtfully)* Si...Sis...Dolly.

KALAMAZOO: Never mind. Sis Dolly can we kindly use your primus stove?

DOLLY: For what Kalamazoo?

KALAMAZOO: I want Musa to make *motoho* [soft porridge] for me... I am hungry.

DOLLY: I ran out of paraffin. Maybe next time you should volunteer to fill the primus stove with it.

KALAMAZOO: But as far as I am concern, you never take anything that I bring.

DOLLY: Cause half of what you bring in this house is questionable.

Musa drops the brown paper bag and the contents spill out, attracting Sis Dolly's attention.

DOLLY: Now what is all this?

KALAMAZOO: Just energy boosters I got from the Indian medicine shop.

DOLLY: *(Irritated)* Will you too please get out of my house.

KALAMAZOO: Okay, no problem Sis Dolly, we'll find somewhere else where Musa can cook for me... clearly you don't want me to have breakfast.

DOLLY: *Voetsek! Tswang.* [Out]

Kalamazoo and Musa quickly exit.

SCENE FOUR

Afternoon: Sounds of busy location scene can be heard outside. Nolo looks through the window, quickly clears her books and exits the house. We see Casey a boy Nolo's age.



CASEY: Beautiful flower of mother earth.

NOLO: *(Irritated)* I told you not to blow whistles when calling me.

CASEY: Are they all in there?

NOLO: Yes... they are.

CASEY: I wanted a moment with you before going in.

NOLO: You look excited.

CASEY: My column is getting great reviews.

NOLO: The Bugs. *(Beat)* Are you going to write about bugs all your life?

CASEY: Look around my *skat* there is enough sadness among our people for me to write about our shackles!

NOLO: So you just want to write about slick bugs and pagan women...?

CASEY: At least it's an escape. Something African people actually need.

NOLO: What about the truth of our conditions?!

CASEY: The truth... Whatever the fuck that means? There's none.

NOLO: So why do you bother writing? Go teach and get a proper job.

CASEY: Come on baby, I came here for us to play. Not to get a lecture.

NOLO: I don't want to play.

CASEY: *(Serious tone)* I am keeping busy Nolo, A'right? That's all we are all doing at *Drum*. Passing and beating the drum with laughter before truth kills us. It's much better than —

From the house Dolly calls Nolo from the house.

DOLLY: NOLO! NOLO! Stop... showing boys your teeth and come inside. Can't you see the world is crumbling out there?

NOLO: *(Shouting)* I am coming Ma. *(At Casey)* I have to go.

CASEY: Will I see you later again?

NOLO: Maybe... I don't know.

SCENE FIVE

Later in the day: Bloke, Dolly & Nolo are at the shebeen.



DOLLY: Hao! Bloke, are you not at to work?

BLOKE: I have been covering the street life. It's depressing to be in the office, Dolly. Walking down Good Street and Gerty Street was like walking through a ghost town of deserted houses, faded dreams and broken lives.

DOLLY: I can smell them. They are getting close.

BLOKE: We already got an eviction letter.

Dolly doesn't respond.

BLOKE: Have you received yours?

DOLLY: I see you have the baby's food with you. How is Fiki, Bloke?

Bloke keeps quiet.

DOLLY: Bloke, won't Fiki mind that you came here first?

Nolo takes out her schoolbooks and starts doing homework.

BLOKE: *Eish!* Fiki will have to wait.

DOLLY: And the baby?

BLOKE: *(Change of subject)* Is Abigail around?

DOLLY: She is out.

Can walks in.

CAN: *(Smooth talk)* Africa is drunk with politics and whiskey, Dolly Baby.

DOLLY: Is it not the same when it comes to love, politics and whiskey?

CAN: Love is too complicated ... stick to politics and never do a cross over to whiskey. *(Beat)* There is too much noise out there and is too quite in here, we need to drown this silence. The *house of truth* should be filled with angel sounds... music makes a man and breaks him... please play me some music *asseblief*, Dolly baby.

DOLLY: I am not in the mood.

ABIGAIL walks in and silently throws some stolen shoes, bags, watches and jewelry on one of the tables and begins to sort through them.

DOLLY: Abigail, I am still waiting for my rent money.

ABIGAIL: *(To Bloke)* Did you bring it? *(Bloke hands her the money.)*
Dankie sani [thank you] *(To Dolly)* *Hier vat* [here take].

DOLLY: *(Counting)* It's short. What about rent for this month?

ABIGAIL: Don't allow stress to grey you, Dolly. I will cover you with too much *nyuku* [money] as soon as this stock is cleared.
(*To Bloke*) I have another pair for your lovely wife.

DOLLY: What did I say about your stolen goods? And trading your business under my roof? You want Van der —

ABIGAIL: That's daily *gong* [song] to have *gatas* on my *backline* [butt].

DOLLY: (*Serious*) *Uthwa mona wena* [listen here]... It's enough that Van der Merwe is always turning my insides with his bribes. The last thing I need... is him sniffing for you in my sheeben, chasing my customers away. Keep your nonsense away from —

ABIGAIL: Thousand pounds of sorries, Sis Dolly. Didn't mean to bench my troubles and chase your *catis* [customers].

BLOKE: *Maar*, Abigail. I always ask myself... WHY do you steal?

ABIGAIL: Because I have employers.

BLOKE: Employers...?

ABIGAIL: *Akere* [listen] just like receivers are employers of *majimbos*; *majimbos* are in a way their employees.

BLOKE: Uhu?

ABIGAIL: Bloke *ke skimmer* [I am always with] the rough- and-tumble type. While you guys are situations.

BLOKE: Situations?

ABIGAIL: *Mfethu!* We are in the streets uneducation, and you *Drum magitas* [guys] are behind the desks. You are the educated dakies who have risen above a dark situation...

CAN: *(Pulling out a cigarette)* We don't have a word called UNEDUCTION in English.

ABIGAIL: I didn't say English was my mother, Can. So back off.

BLOKE: It would be ideal to write about your thug business, but —

ABIGAIL: *Ekse nog 'n a cherrie.* I know *vele*, you *Drum* boys rather put a photo of a naked *nine* [girl] than real *makoya* persons.

BLOKE: I heard you always have the whole scoop?

ABIGAIL: *Gaz'lam* [friend] You seem to forget that I have the direct numbers to *tsotsies'* slum. The whole 411-yard [street gossip].

DOLLY: One day... all that is going to end.

CAN: Like Old Testament.

BLOKE: *(Worried)* Sof'town is a problem and pleasure. And we all know the end of a slum is a tragedy to any society.

DOLLY: Are you all going to keep talking or place the order? Cause if you are not spending best you leave my shebeen for customers who can buy.

CAN: I would like whiskey on the rocks.

BLOKE: Make it two...

ABIGAIL: Third one.

CAN: Whiskey works quite inevitably... set me free whiskey...
send me home music, let me talk politics and whiskey... the
kind of syncopation... (*Starts playing with words singing*)

Song: Syncopation

It's syncopation (chorus)

Modulation

Obligation

Jubilation

Something between

Laughing humane baritone

And honking tonking trombone

(Dolly serves drinks. Can pulls her closer to dance.)

Syncopation (chorus)

Modulation

Obligation

Jubilation

DOLLY: Who is paying off this open tab?

BLOKE: I will take care of it Sis Dolly.

Casey walks in with piles of letters. They exchange smiles with Nolo.

CASEY: *Die Juba wat de Maraks moet die chandis speel...* now what is
all this big noise about?

BLOKE: "Kid"

CASEY: Heita! Daar!

BLOKE: Kid Casey, come and join us.

CASEY: I most certainly will. (*Shouting*) Sis Dolly...ek het 'n brief — from one of the readers.

DOLLY: I keep forgetting that you are a self-help doctor- *matwetwe*.

CASEY: Indeed I am... while Bra Can, Bloke and others are busy reporting on war, guns, politics and *tsotsies*. Some readers just want to talk about love, *cherries*, *matara's* and dames.

Casey hands Dolly a letter.

DOLLY: You are going to be using my name to respond to your readers again?

CASEY: (*Pleading*) "Dear Sis Dolly" please read.

Dolly takes the letter and reads loud.

DOLLY: *I am 18 and madly in love with a boy of 20. I am so sure of my love for him that I find it difficult to smile at another. But I have just discovered that my boy's mother is my father's lover. Although they have had no issues and are not living together, I feel there is a strong relationship with the boy. I am perplexed. What am I to do? OMOKUBA/ Benin City.*

CASEY: Mmmmm! *Jerre tog hoe antwoord ek* such a letter? [how do I answer such letter]

CAN: (*Responds to letter.*) Nothing stops you from continuing with your boyfriend. It is not uncommon for stepchildren to have romance heading to marriage and some have made success of such marriage. (*Beat*) There you go. Next?

Casey starts to write, as Can talks.

NOLO: Are you really going to write down what *malome* Can says and put my mother's name down as if it is were her giving the advice?

CASEY: Yes ma'm...

DOLLY: How about you tell that girl to keep her legs crossed and to locked up?

CASEY: Eish! Sis Dolly that's not good enough.

DOLLY: Nolo please bring my bag.

CASEY: *Wag!* Sis Dolly... another brief.

DOLLY: It will have to wait.

CASEY: It won't take long. This time it's a guy.

Abigail takes the letter from Casey to read.

ABIGAIL: I...a...m 25-year-old.

NOLO: Let me help you with that, auntie. *(Takes the letter.) I am 25 years old, in love with two beautiful girls. They both have good manners and I love them equally. I wish to get married, but I cannot decide which one to make my wife. What do you say?*
— *J.M Harare*

ABIGAIL: Toss a coin, chum! *Kop kapa tails?*

They all laugh. Abigail takes her stock to her room. Dolly takes her bag.

DOLLY: I need to really go. I only have Wednesdays to visit my husband.

CAN: You not taking Nolo, with?

DOLLY: She doesn't want to go.

CAN: *(Clears his throat.)* Bloke I am out.

BLOKE: Going to the office?

CAN: *Nah!* Meeting someone. *(Gives Bloke a sign to follow him.)*

BLOKE: *Aaaah!* I should also be heading home. Kid! Come lets exchange words outside.

All three men exit.

NOLO: He is coming back.

DOLLY: You are talking about what you don't know —

NOLO: *Ho jwalo* [is it so]? What is the real story then, Mama?

DOLLY: *(Sadly)* Like I said there is more to why the police took him ...

NOLO: You either don't want to talk about him or you are defend HIM. I don't get it.

DOLLY: Him being your father?

Nolo doesn't respond.

DOLLY: The system did to me... I mean your father... us... what you don't understand and know.

NOLO: We can't always blame the system... when things don't work in our favour.

DOLLY: The system is not kind, child.

NOLO: Still no one has the right to take life out of another. No matter the circumstances.

DOLLY: Please come with me.

NOLO: I'd rather not.

DOLLY: *(Serious)* You know he has been writing you letters. And I see you have not even opened or read any of them.

NOLO: Is he coming back?

DOLLY: He is trying to connect with you. He is not as bad as you think he is. Get to know him.

NOLO: *(Long pause)* He is in jail okay... and he —

DOLLY: *(Firmly)* Jail or not... He is your father. Start writing back to him... talk to him... you will see the side of him you don't know.

NOLO: I don't want my words to be locked up behind bars. Words are meant to free one.

Dolly exits. We hear soft kwela music of Todd Matshikiza playing in the background

SCENE SIX

Casey returns to the shebeen to find Nolo.

- NOLO: *(Jumps)* Tjhoo! You almost gave me a fright.
- CASEY: I have been waiting outside for your mother to leave. *(Gently touches Nolo on the face.)* What are you thinking?
- NOLO: I am thinking blue.
- CASEY: Blue the colour of jazz, the smell of fresh rain, and the newness I feel in my heart...
- NOLO: The tone and sound of waves cracking against the rock. And what are you thinking?
- CASEY: Your eyes, warm and brown like the earth resting on my feet.
- NOLO: You are silly.
- CASEY: I have never been more serious. Come here.
- NOLO: No space to stand on ... everything is demolished.
- CASEY: You can stand on top of the bricks.
- NOLO: They are unstable.
- CASEY: I will hold you *(Long Silence)* I went to church.
- NOLO: Today?
- CASEY: *Struee* as God, Ma'm.

NOLO: Ma'm? For what?

He kneels in front of her.

CASEY: Forgive me father for I have sinned . . . I have sinned exceedingly in thought, word, and deed, by my fault, my own fault, my own most grievous fault . . .

NOLO: *(Smiling)* Have you *really*?

CASEY: No doubt the actual sin is loving this girl too much. But what would you have done in my place?

NOLO: And whose fault is it in the sight of God? And what, anyway, can I advise?

CASEY: It wouldn't matter when I see her smile... or hear her laughter.

NOLO: Don't let yourself get into bad company. Don't be carried away by the love bug. Find something more interesting than love...gambling?

CASEY: Well, it's not so easy to describe how I feel about her . . . that's quality of unselfishness. Maybe I should show her and stop telling her.

Casey pulls her closer with both his arms. They kiss. Abigail walks in on them.

ABIGAIL: The rats are out and the cat... cats is... are busy. Nxa!

CASEY: It's actually the other way round.

ABIGAIL: Shut your gab, *bavino* [young boy] just picture if I was Dolly.

NOLO: Sorry *mamane* [auntie].

ABIGAIL: Sorry wont help once you have a *baan* [bun] inside the oven.
Nolo, I think it you think you are a woman now.

NOLO: No *mamane* [auntie].

ABIGAIL: Keep away from *gashus* [fools] like this one; they will make
you food babies —

CASEY: *Cherries* don't make *bambinos* alone, right?

ABIGAIL: *(With a hard look.)* Don't be *slim* [clever].

CASEY: We wont make that mistake. *(Long pause)* A...a... aaa.
Abigail, can I *skryf* about your *jimbos* in my next article?

ABIGAIL: At what tap [price]?

CASEY: There is a tag?

ABIGAIL: *(Unimpressed)* Is *vaar* [true]?

Casey keeps quiet.

ABIGAIL: Casey... Casey my *brakie* [puppy]... dont *vat* [take] the bone
away from *inja* [dog]. You will be in jive. Plus, you are small.

CASEY: I can take any danger.

ABIGAIL: *(Smiling)* You will make me the front page?

NOLO: I can never imagine *Drum* cover with auntie Abigail as oppose
to the top models and —

CASEY: Cover! *Is waar* [true].

ABIGAIL: Pinkie-cross?! (*Cross fingers*) If you speaking liars *charmer-boy* I cook you.

NOLO: Don't make promises you can't keep, Casey.

CASEY: *Is vaar* [true].

ABIGAIL: Sure thing. *Bloma!* *Hier* [sit]. (*Beat*) Nolo, bring me beer.

Nolo quickly exits and enters back with a beer.

ABIGAIL: I live by my own rules. *Nou* [now], chop me.

CASEY: How do you find your target?

ABIGAIL: (*Smiling*) Aaaaah! That is priceless, '*n moegoe is nog 'n moegoe*. I am a symbol of independence and freedom. Even when at the back of the shadows, is Musa being bulldozed first by her boyfriend Zoo and all of us by *gatas*. (*Beat*) now *skryf* ... write down all this as well Nolo... *skryf* about Sophiatown, Sof'town, *Kofifi*...

Nolo quickly takes out pen and paper.

NOLO: Sof'town it's a slum!

ABIGAIL: See, Nolo, these *Drum* boys, they always *bloma* [sit] with the books while the rest of us are out there *blaending* [blending] and *chackalazing* [mixing].

NOLO: What got you to Jo'burg?

ABIGAIL: I have always been street *crobas* [guy]. So when I got here from banana land [Durban]. I befriended all street angels.

NOLO: Angles.

CASEY: Don't interrupt her.

ABIGAIL: I've been too much corners, you see... (*Tense*) Give me *dozo daar* [cigarette], Casey. (*Beat*) My father couldn't even dream having a daughter who is a *shimself* [gay]. And *nna* [me] I was clear from on step. I like *cherries*... not gents. My fathers picture of me getting tied and having bambinos was his dream not me. When my voice spoke to this, he told me to *chiep-uit* [leave] his roof.

NOLO: That's sad.

ABIGAIL: *Nie! dis just goed* [good] pleasure to be away from my father's whip in the family fields!

CASEY: What about your mother... siblings?

ABIGAIL: The last my mother saw of me was when I wrote a *brief* [letter]... reporting to her I was in the 'Gold City'.

NOLO: City Of Gold.

ABIGAIL: *Ja!* I had become part of the wild, stabbing, over smelling Jo'burg.

CASEY: And now you a member of the *noasisas*.

NOLO: *Noasisas?!*

ABIGAIL: Professional female shoplifters.

CASEY: They wear broad skirts and carry large handbags.

ABIGAIL: *(Correcting)* Well a thing like that.

NOLO: Why?

ABIGAIL: It's tricks.

NOLO: How is it a trick?

ABIGAIL: You arrive at shop with a *tsotsie*, while he engages the shopkeeper in speak... A *noasisa* helps her self with articles that are unwatched at the counter...

NOLO: Ohoooo! And then you throw the stuff inside your big handbag?

ABIGAIL: Half the time there isn't a chance to put the stolens in the big sack. That's where the balloon skirt comes in *(Demonstrating)* you just smuggle things between your legs, like this.

CASEY: Have you ever been caught?

ABIGAIL: *(Laughing)* I don't wear bloomers.

CASEY & NOLO: Uhu?!

ABIGAIL: Which Indian shopkeeper can want to page a-black-woman without bloomers? *(Laughs)*

There is a knock at the door. KNOCK! KNOCK! KNOCK!

ABIGAIL: Who is pinning knocks at a shebeen?

NOLO: Someone who is not from here. *(Beat)* Come in.

In walks a beautiful well-dressed woman.

FIKI: *Kgotsong* [good day].

ABIGAIL: Sis, don't stand by the door... you will make money fly out this roof.

FIKI: Oho! Sorry.

NOLO: *Ausi* Fiki... [Sister].

FIKI: Nolo, I am looking for Bloke. I was told he might be here.

ABIGAIL: And who is you?

NOLO: His wife.

CASEY: Have you tried at *Drum*?

FIKI: He is not there. *(Pause)* He has not been home for few days. And many people said he might be here with Can.

ABIGAIL: *Majombos ba ya baiza maan* [men are mess up].

NOLO: *Ausi* [sister] Fiki, he comes here usually after work.

FIKI: Do you think he will come today?

NOLO: I am not sure.

FIKI: Please tell him he needs to come home.

ALL: ...

Fiki exit as lights pick on Nolo alone.

NOLO: Sophiatown is going to be like one of its own many victims; a man gored by the knives lying in the open gutters, a tiny little raison in the smelling drains, dying of multiple stab wounds after being stabbed by a toothpick. Or fathers who leave it standing in wonder like men who leave their wives wondering, what's next?

SCENE SEVEN

Late evening: Dolly is busy counting her stock. When from her outside window she notices a white leg coming in. Can stumbles in, pushing a white girl NADIA in front of him.

DOLLY: *(Shocked)* En Nou?!

Can and Nadia look at each other, then at the window.

DOLLY: No! No! No ways Can, not you too... And where do you think you are going with the white girl?

CAN: Aa... a Dolly, baby... this is Nadia.

NADIA: *(Nervous)* Hello...

DOLLY: *(Not impressed)* I didn't ask you her name.

CAN: She is my date... I mean colleague.

NADIA: *(Nervously hands out her hand)* It is really nice meeting you.

DOLLY: I said where do you think you taking her?

CAN: We just came back from the *Odin* cinema.

NADIA: To see a movie. Double feature.

DOLLY: But we only get the movies long after white areas. She would have already seen everything.

CAN: *(Irritated)* It doesn't matter. Sophiatown was itching. We had to go.

DOLLY: With her... *(Beat)* wait is that my *doek* [head wrap), Can?

CAN: Where... Ohoooo! You mean on her *(takes off the doek that Nadia has)* Yes! It's yours. We were trying to disguise.

NADIA: *(Taking off a jersey)* I think this is also yours. Thank you.

Dolly takes both her doek and jersey.

DOLLY: Who gave you my things?

CAN: Well, Nolo was trying to help.

DOLLY: So you covered her hair and arms but left her legs exposed.
Who wouldn't see she is white?

Dolly irritated continues to tidy up her place. Both Can and Nadia exit quietly towards the backroom. In a split second we hear police sirens, dogs and guns. Dolly switches the lights off. But Can and Nadia walk right back in a hurry.

DOLLY: What now?

CAN: POLICE!

DOLLY: ... SO.

CAN: *(Uncertain)* What are we going to do?

DOLLY: WE? ... Do?!

NADIA: Tell them that I am here on business.

DOLLY: A white woman doing business in Sophiatown, with a black man? No, take her back to the Odin.

CAN: Dolly please help, us...

Dolly grabs Nadia, points inside the room divider.

DOLLY: This way, Nadia.

Nadia looks at Can, who nodded. Nadia stumbles inside the room divider.

DOLLY: There goes Nadia!

CAN: *(Joking)* She ought to be black!

DOLLY: let me go to bed before the police bang my door down and find your girlfriend.

CAN: She is not my girlfriend...

DOLLY: It's just a matter of time.

Dolly leaves Can and Nadia in the dark. We hear sirens and police dogs getting closer. There are footsteps approaching the house. Soon there is a loud bang on the door.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

CAN: *(Whispering)* Who is it?

ABIGAIL: It's me Bra Canny... please can I come in... the *gattas* [police] are after me.

CAN: *Voetsek*, Abigail!

ABIGAIL: Oooo! That's how you bite me today. *Sizo hlangana joe* [I will catch you.]

CAN: Go away.

Abigail walks off. Can turn his attention towards Nadia.

CAN: *(Whispering)* Are you okay, Nadia?

NADIA: *(Upset)* What do you expect?

Can join Nadia inside the room divider.

CAN: *(Whispering)* Did I tell you about this story I am writing.

NADIA: *(Nervous)* You're always writing a story, Can.

CAN: But this one is different. Ha! Ha! Ha! Imagine a husband... he is a lawyer and his name is Philemon. He finds Matilda his wife in bed with her beau. The lover legs it in his underpants, leaving behind a sharp suit draped neatly on a coat hanger. Philemon decides to punish Matilda by treating this suit as an "honoured guest" which has to be given a seat at mealtimes and taken for walks in the street. Ha! Ha! Ha! The title is *The Suit*.

NADIA: I have a better one for you --- Imagine a husband... let us say ... his name is Philemon, a house-husband and her lawyer wife's Matilda. The wife finds the husband with another woman. The mistress legs it in leaving her bra and panties between the sheets. The wife decides to punish Philemon by treating his mistresses under wears as "honoured guests", which are to be given a seat at mealtimes and taken for walks in the street. The title is *The Panties*. *(Beat)* What do you think?

Can is lost for words.

NADIA: My thoughts exactly.

CAN: (Beat) Hai! Man Nadia... I am just trying to make you less scared.



Sounds of police and sirens have moved far from the house. Can helps Nadia out and they both walk out to his backroom: Song Transition

Song: Indlela

Iphiiii indlela X 3

Iphiiii indlela X 3

A'ulali, siya hamba X 3

A'ulali siya hamba X 3

O'zohamba nami

E ntabeni

O'gibonise, yonke indlela

E'ngkololeko

Iphiiii indlela X 3

Iphiiii indlela X 3

A'ulali, siya hamba X 3

A'ulali siya hamba X 3

SCENE EIGHT

The following morning: Dolly and Nadia are having tea.

NADIA: I couldn't believe that I was crouched inside *that* room divider?

DOLLY: It must be different for white people then. We are used to raids.

NADIA: I could see the police lights through the outside window and was so scared.

DOLLY: You felt the full force of apartheid.

NADIA: I had my moment of truth.

Nolo walks in with a letter and hands it to Dolly.

DOLLY: What's this...

NOLO: A letter...

DOLLY: *(Opening the letter)* I hope it's not one of those Casey's self help –

Dolly's body lowers down. She quietly pulls out a chair and sits down.

NOLO: This time it would be better if you give advice as opposed to *malome* Can or Abigail giving advice...

DOLLY: *(Defeated)* Its eviction notice...

NADIA: Who is getting evicted?

DOLLY: Do you see anyone else?

NADIA: And they send you a letter?

DOLLY: We have a month to move our belongings.

NADIA: What?!

NOLO: *(Worried)* Where will we go, Mama?

DOLLY: These days you get lucky if they inform you before hand.

NADIA: How can they do that?

DOLLY: As far as I am concern ... it's your people, why don't you ask them? *(Beat)* The fucking irony is what they don't get is that Sophiatown is a spirit not a place. No matter where they take us, we will build a new Sophiatown.

NADIA: I can't speak for all the white people, Dolly... I can't change all their ideologies. But I am truly sorry —

DOLLY: Sorry doesn't help. Whiteness has a luxury to dream! If you are black Nadia... to see out the day no more scathed than before is the dream...

NADIA: I am going to write about this. Some one has to speak out —

DOLLY: What difference would it make? Uhu?! Isn't it Smuts himself who said Sophiatown should be written off as a slum; its values must be those of the slum; its people must be dirty, undesirable, and above all, unseen...

NOLO: Ma...

DOLLY: What?!

NOLO: You could try being much nicer.

DOLLY: Why be good when THEY.

By now Abigail walks in pregnant with stolen shoes, tablecloths and shirts. She takes a seat and begins to take out the goods from her belly.

NOLO: *(Beat)* Hao! The trick is no longer to put the stuff between your legs now?

ABIGAIL: You have to A-Z your *dice* [game], Nolo.

NADIA: You mean up your game. You know what...let me go.

DOLLY: That's the best thing you have ever said since —

ABIGAIL: *(Focuses on Nadia)* What's your size, Princess?

NADIA: I don't do stolen shoes.

ABIGAIL: *Jy dink jy's better neh* [you think you better]?!

NOLO: Will you ever come again?

NADIA: Maybe... perhaps. *(Exit)*

Dolly sadly goes into her bedroom, Nolo and Abigail breaks into a song: Jerusalem:

*Last night lay a –sleeping
There came a dream so fair,
I stood in old Jerusalem
Besides the temple there
I heard the children singing,
And ever as they sang
Me thought the voice of angels*

*From heaven in answer rang
Me thought the voice of angels
From heaven us answer ring*

*Jerusalem! Jerusalem!
Lift up your gates and sing
Hosanna in the highest!
Hosanna to your King!*

SCENE NINE

Late evening: Van der Merwe and his boys at Dolly's house again. Nolo is standing in the corner watching.



VAN DER MERWE: Dolly I want my cut.

DOLLY: But constable Van der Merwe, I am short of money to buy my stock.

VAN DER MERWE: You have been good paying me off. We can't go back and forth like this.

DOLLY: Come back month end. You know It's usually quiet this time of the —

VAN DER MERWE: But you have been having parties here and I heard people saying some of your boys bring white girls. And hiding that thug chick —

DOLLY: ABIGAIL.

VAN DER MERWE: Ja! You crossing the law, Dolly?

DOLLY: I don't know where she is... I kicked her out months back. And there has never been any white girl here.

VAN DER MERWE: *(Instructing)* Search her bedroom.

DOLLY: *Hobaneng o sa understand maar* [Why don't you understand]?

Under one of the tables police find a box with four bottles of brandy.

VAN DER MERWE: Aha! So you don't have stock, but have these four bottles of brandy? I am taking you to charge office.

DOLLY: *(Begging)* Oho! My baas I am sorry... With everyone being kicked out of Sophiatown business is slow. I was still waiting for my weekly customers to come and square the books. And there are people who owe me rent money. I promise to join you later at the charge office. For now hold on to these four bottles.

VAN DER MERWE: *(Smiling)* Aright I know you are a woman of your words.

Van der Merwe instructs the other police officers to leave the house. A soft kwela song starts playing in the background. Lights dim on other characters to focus on the frightened Nolo.

NOLO: And though she had promised to follow the police; this time my mother didn't keep her word, and never followed Van der Merwe to charge office.

Dolly's house is transformed into a mini court area as other characters walk in.

Monday morning when the courtroom opened. My mother went in and made herself comfortable among the spectators. When the clerk of the court called her...

CLERK: Dolly Kw —

DOLLY: *(Stands up)* I don't need an interpreter.

Nolo continues to narrate as other characters take positions.

NOLO: The magistrate read the charge without looking up. On the desk in front of the prosecutor stood the four bottles of brandy. Next to them stood the cheerful Van der Merwe.

MARGISTRATE: *Sisinyana* [little woman], you are charged with being in

possession of four bottles of brandy. How do you plead, guilty or not guilty?

The magistrate waits for the interpreter to put it across to Dolly.

DOLLY: I heard and understood every word. And am shocked it was four.

MAGISTRATE: Yes, four, it says here.

Dolly shakes her head slowly and frowns.

MAGISTRATE: *(Repeating)* Four. *(Points at the four bottles of brandy on the desk)*

DOLLY: Your Honour, the bottles were not four, they were a dozen.

MAGISTRATE: A what?

By now the interpreter tries to repeat what is being said, but is totally cut off.

DOLLY: A dozen, Your Honour.

MAGISTRATE: Then why did they... he . . . I mean, what happened to the other bottles?

DOLLY: I don't know, Your Honour, better ask the Constable who raided my place.

MAGISTRATE: *(Turning to Van der Merwe)* Is it true what the accused claims, Constable — that there were twelve bottles and not four?

MERWE: NO! Your Honour, there were only four bottles of brandy under the table, which she —

DOLLY: *(Shaking her head)* Your Honour, would I want to pay for twelve bottles when I can hardly afford to pay for four? I had to search the bottom of the barrel besides running to friends and relatives for the money I have here. Which is money for twelve bottles.

MARGISTRATE: How much money have you got there?

DOLLY: *(Taking money out of her bag.)* Knowing, Your Honour, that the fine for one bottle of brandy is fifteen pounds---and I'm going to stop selling it as I'd rather stick to *skokiaan* [traditional beer] and the fine is only five pounds per four gallons — I brought along with me, Your Honour, a hundred and eighty pounds for the dozen bottles.

MAGISTRATE: Count the accuser's money.

CLERK: *(Counting)* A hundred and eighty pounds, Your Honour.

The magistrate turns to Sergeant Van der Merwe.

MAGISTRATE: Where are the other eight bottles, Constable?

VAN DER MERWE: I told Your Honour that there were only four bottles!

MARGISTRATE: Come now, Constable, are you seriously trying to tell me that this woman, or anyone for that matter, would prefer paying a fine of a hundred and eighty pounds to that of sixty? Let's not waste the court's time, where are the other eight bottles?

VAN DER MERWE: I swear, Your Honour, there were only four bottles, that she give ---

MARGISTRATE: When you found those bottles, you assumed there were four inside the box... under her table?

Van der Merwe doesn't respond.

MAGISTRATE: This is waste of the court's time. Release the accused and give her, her money back.

SCENE TEN

The shebeen is packed with clients. Dolly is on stage singing as if accompanied by a band.



*Back of the moon bus x 2
Top shebeen in Jo'burg
Is Back of the Moon
Right in front is,
Back of the Moon
Behind the shacks is,
Back of the moon x 2*

Casey and Nolo walk in, flirting none stop. Dolly is watching from a distant.

DOLLY: *(Serious tone)* Casey what are you doing with my daughter?
Every time I see you, I am also seeing her. Why?

CASEY: Nothing Ma'm... we met in the street.

Dolly turns to look at her daughter.

DOLLY: *(Agitated)* Where have you been?

NOLO: *(With attitude)* Late studying with a friend...

DOLLY: *(Calmly)* Which friend? *(Beat)* I said which friend... cause last time I checked all your friends have been shipped to Soweto.

When I came back from court you were not here and the house was up side down... I am not going to ask you again young lady. Where in the world have you been?

NOLO: ... *(She looks at Casey)*

DOLLY: Why are you looking at him? Does he have an answer?

NOLO: ... *(Drops her eyes)*

DOLLY: You think I am stupid.

CASEY: Ma'm...

DOLLY: *Thola!* [Shut Up]

NOLO: Okay I wasn't with a b—

DOLLY: *Wena!* You chasing after boys, neh?! Don't you know they will give you a baby an...

NOLO: I am not chasing after boys...

DOLLY: Didn't I say you should focus on your studies? And leave adults stuff.

NOLO: *(Attitude)* I wasn't with boys. I was with him, only.

DOLLY: What did you say?

NOLO: *(Attitude)* I said I was with him *(Points at Casey)*.

CASEY: Nolo...

NOLO: No, Casey... I am tired of been treated like a child in this house. I am old enough to be with you.

DOLLY: Don't give me... have you forgotten who am I?

NOLO: I know who you are... but I will never allow myself to be anything like y —

ABIGAIL: NOLO.

DOLLY: Don't stop her Abigail... let her speak.

NOLO: I will never hold onto a man who killed someone else. Casey is different from Papa.

Voices in the room are raising and the music stops.

DOLLY: *Hao!* You are growing a big mouth. *(Sarcastic)* She thinks she is nothing like me yet she is going to end up like me.

NOLO: I will never be like you. *(Boastful)* I am going to be an educated woman and not turn my home into a beer hall ... graced by men who care-less about their women. I am going to do better because I am better.

DOLLY: *Hao!* You going to be better than who?

CASEY: *(Uncomfortable)* Is it possible for you Nolo to shut up?

Nolo about to walk off is pulled back by Dolly.

DOLLY: Hey wena! I am talking to you don't you dare give me your back.

Nolo walks off with her back turned to her mother again.

DOLLY: *Keng ka wena?* What has gotten into you, child? I will kill you Nolo, do you hear me... I will kill you with both my hands and take the life I gave you.

Dolly picks a chair and about to throws it at Nolo.

ABIGAIL: *(Blocking the chair)* Dolly vag... *nie so nie* [not like this].

Musa comes in running and take cover behind Dolly.

DOLLY: *Keng jwale* [what's this now]?

ABIGAIL: Musa ... *as jy* grand?

Kalamazoo budes into the shebeen as well.

MUSA: He... yes! I'm fine...

ABIGAIL: You don't look it... *O'dlovile... vier?* [He beat you up again]

MUSA: No ...

ABIGAIL: What was the jive this time?

MUSA: I don't know...

ABIGAIL: What self pretty *Cherrie* like you doing with a *Zoo maar?*

KALAMAZOO: ABIGAIL.

MUSA: *(Holds her stomach)* I'm not feeling well. *(Falls to the floor)*

Blood starts dripping between Musa's thighs. Nolo freaks out in horror.

NOLO: She is bleeding!

KALAMAZOO: *(To Nolo)* Boil this for her. *(To Musa)* You have a show tonight and needs to be up.

NOLO: But she is not well.

KALAMAZOO: She just needs to drink *muti* then she will be fine.

ABIGAIL: Musa, this *gashu* [guy] is going to *gadazisa* [kill] you if you don't lose him.

KALAMAZOO: Shut up! *Wena godoba* [dreaded wizard] I organized a show for her to perform here tonight. The boys already paid.

DOLLY: So money is more important than Musa's life?

KALAMAZOO: I am just saying. I can't give their money back.

Nolo quickly brings a blanket and towel from the bedroom to protect the sofa. Dolly gently picks and lowers Musa down and puts a blanket on her.

ABIGAIL: *Entlik!* Who gave you *die muti* [this medicine]?

KALAMAZOO: Kwakwariri

DOLLY: But Kwakwariri is dead....

ABIGAIL: Who?

DOLLY: Kwakwariri the witchdoctor from Basotho Land.

KALAMAZOO: He came back to life.

DOLLY: For the third time?

KALAMAZOO: Just like the first time when he was laid out. Remember how his friends, clients, family and relatives lamented, they put him in a fine coffin of expensive wood and took him to the graveside. After the ceremony, they lowered the coffin in the grave and began to pile earth upon it. As they did so, they heard a great thumping on the lid. Hastily they dug the coffin out, prised the nails from the lid and out climbed Kwakwariri. He was shaky but no worse for his expense. (*Chuffed to tell the story.*) Same thing the second time. (*Laughs*)

NOLO: Look what he did to Musa, now.

KALAMAZOO: Mind yours Nolo. (*To Casey*) *Hey wena sani* [Hey you], what are you doing?

CASEY: *Haaa! Bra Kalamazoo...*

KALMAZOO: *Votsek!* Out you going to write about what you see here...

Casey walks off quickly.

KALAMAZOO: *Wena*, you should be a real dame and stop going to school and mixing with boys like these one's. *Nxa!* As far as I am concern education is not for girls.

DOLLY: Leave my child alone, Kalamazoo.

NOLO: So I should be a hindrance rather than a help to the men who I chose to be with?

KALAMAZOO: Listen, I am your uncle. I am warning you, no man wants a girl who is too much.

NOLO: I don't want to think and talk only about what to cook and how to get rid of stains.

KALAMAZOO: Don't be like Abigail who has adopted a bellicose attitude towards us.

ABIGAIL: Don't poke me.

KALMAZOO: I want to help with your *lobola* [dowry] negotiations... your father would want his share.

DOLLY: What is wrong with these kids, today?

NOLO: But my father did not raise me. How can someone who is not contributing to your growth be entitled to one's *lobola*?

KALAMAZOO: *Nxa!* Casey mustn't think he can have you for free, as far as I am concern. *Nxa!* Stupid boy. *(To Nolo)* And *wena*, you can't question culture and how things are... Tell him, if he interested, then I want that *lobola*. No window-shopping for *mahala* [free] here.

NOLO: Leave me alone Kalamazoo...

KALAMAZOO: I am your uncle *wena*... not just Kala...

DOLLY: Kalamazoo... How can you take Musa to that witch?

ABIGAIL: Ja! *Nou look what die le-chemi* [witch] did.

DOLLY: *(Beat)* Nolo go by Dr Mohamed, tell him ... I have a situation and need help.

Lights focus on Nolo as she exits to the streets.

NOLO: Everyone in Sophiatown is the friend of fear. Fear is so afraid of us that it hides itself inside bullets, dogs, gandagandas and burst during a fit of frustration and chaos and

paranoia coupled with claustrophobia. Many of us die before we are born...and if we are alive we swallow poverty and bullets so that we can live in peace and harmony. We are reborn without the Bible...we are different. (*Starts to sing*)

Back in the shebeen.

KALAMAZOO: Don't give me that look Abigail.

ABIGAIL: *Nna* [me] I know your *mojombi* [penis] type.

KALAMAZOO: Watch your mouth.

ABIGAIL: *Moegoes* [fools] type.

KALAMAZOO: As far as I am concern... you don't know me.

ABIGAIL: I know your *mkatakata* [problem] kind o'right ... men who are not enough.... just like my *timer*.

KALAMAZOO: I am nothing like your father.

ABIGAIL: Just like *jou! broer*. [Brother]

KALAMAZOO: As far as I am concern. I didn't kill a man or deserted my wife and child.

ABIGAIL: No different. You are all them wolfs.

KALAMAZOO: Shut your mouth.

DOLLY: Will you two... stop it.

ABIGAIL: Or what, Zoo? (*Tense moment*)

Kalamazoo pulls out a knife and charges after Abigail.

ABIGAIL: You pulling a *goni* [knife] at me? (*Picks an empty bottle.*)

DOLLY: Not in my fucken house. Take this *kak* to the streets.

Kalamazoo takes his seat back.

KALAMAZOO: I have better things to worry about... like Musa.

Abigail puts the bottle down, but remain standing with her eyes fixed on Kalamazoo.

DOLLY: You clearly forced Musa to have a back street abortion...

ABIGAIL: ... got that *le-chemi* [witch] to work his witchcraft my Musa.

KALAMAZOO: As far as I am concern, Musa is almost a star; we
can't have a child now. (*Frustrated*) She never listens to me.

DOLLY: Did she get her self-pregnant?

KALAMAZOO: ...

ABIGAIL: (*Warning*) Zoo, don't pull that *goni* on me like so again.
Otherwise your *petrol juice* [blood] will run from Kensington,
pass city Jo'burg, until it lands at the smelling drains,
sweaty streets and wounded pavements of *Sof'town* to pack
right inside your dark room.

Kalamazoo quickly drags himself out of the house. Song Transition.

King Kong

King Kong- mountain gorilla

King Kong- lord of the ring,

King Kong- heavyweight killer,

That's me, I am him

King Kong.
The greatest guy!
The greatest guy!
King Kong!
King Kong!

SCENE ELEVEN

Late evening: Nolo is looking at Musa who is coming in and out of the house with her bags. We can hear the primus stove purring softly with a steaming pot on it.

NOLO: I am startled out of my reverie. I can't even smell the enticing smell of meat, potatoes and curry on the primus stove. There is an extra companion in the room, FEAR. It entered with that unlikable face. The one that heartily laughs yet clings to your face, too close to the bones. The vicious character, with something brutal and razor-like about the corners of its mouth.

MUSA: Nolo, I am scared.

NOLO: *Ke ya tseba* [I know].

MUSA: But I have to do this. I can't take it any more.

NOLO: Jaaaa! *Best* you leave Kala and Sophitown. Abigail has a plan. So don't worry too much. *(Beat)*

MUSA: He can't keep on taking my money and beating me up.

NOLO: *Vele!* [true].
Kalamazoo enters drunk and stumbling.

KALAMAZOO: Mmmm! It smells nice. Who is cooking or getting cooked?

Musa hands her bags to Nolo.

KALAMAZOO: Oooooo! Wait. W...what's this nowww. *(Beat)* Nolo, whoooooose bags are those?

Nolo doesn't move.

MUSA: How long do you want this thing to go on, Khala? I am tired of you, okay. I am tired of being used and being beaten up.

KALAMAZOO: See y..o...u spending tooooo much time with Abigail n...now you think you're c... clever, Nxa!

Kalamazoo takes Musa's bags from Nolo.

MUSA: You drunk. Got drunk with my money, that's what.

KALAMAZOO: I a... m your manager... I ... de...serve some. *(Beat.)* By the way... as faaaaar... as I am concern I am not drunk ... a ... an... nd... don't grumble me...'

MUSA: You are fired... You play me the fool with it, that's what.

KALAMAZOO: Sssssh! Sssshut Up! You're growing a looooud voice. It's n...not pretty on a lady.

MUSA: I... am not...

Abigail walks in.

KALAMAZOO: Sssshut your big ugly mmmmmouth, BITCH.

ABIGAIL: Zoo, stop *kak* and bullshitting.

KALAMAZOO: *(Scornful)* Hey wena ugly fat potato, Musa is a bitch... you are a bitch... you all are *bitchies*.

NOLO: I think you need to keep quite now, *malome* K—

KALAMAZOO: *(Angry)* I can fuck you aaallll and beat you all... damn you!

MUSA: You so wrong, Kala... always; wanting to control. *(Beat)* I don't want you anymore.

NOLO: Yes, she doesn't want you anymore.

MUSA: *(Angry)* You made me kill my child, that's what.

KALAMAZOO: How dooo... I... know it was mine? It might have been the child of alllll those men you enjoy dancing with, *fucken* bitchhh. You bus...sy fucking around!

Kalamazoo tries to swing a fist at Musa, Abigail blocks him. He tries to hit Abigail but misses and falls. He tries to stand.

ABIGAIL: What is your jive, Zoo? What you standing up to do?
(Warning) Nolo, clear your shadows off [leave the room] you don't want storms to hit you.

Nolo hesitant goes outside. We can see her shadow from the outside window watching and listening.

ABIGAIL: Didn't your *nenne* [mother] teach you never to talk ugly on women and GOD?

KALAMAZOO: What does God have to do with a fat, ugly —

Musa holds him by the pans. Kalamazoo crashing clap sends Musa down on her knees.

KALAMAZOO: *(Stumbling)* I'll show you who I am! *(Holds Musa by the neck and starts to kicking her. Musa is screaming).* Get up! Get up!

MUSA: I can't---I can't---my knee!

Abigail holds Kalamazoo by the scruff of the neck; his eyes flickered in the glow of the candlelight. Musa gets up and stands by the corner.

ABIGAIL: I am tired of your bulling, grousing, roaring and fuming *kak...*

Abigail had not finished her sentence when Kalamazoo pushes her hard against the table and she falls. He takes out a knife and goes after Musa. Abigail stands up and goes into the kitchen and comes back with a boiling pot from the primus stove. She lands the pot in the middle of Kalamazoo's skull with a heavy gong sound. Kalamazoo falls. Musa struggling; loosens from his grip. Kalamazoo doesn't move.

MUSA: *(Sobbing)* He... he... is not moving. *Bathong!* Abigail, he is not moving.

ABIGAIL: He will be tall soon.

MUSA: *(Feeling for the pulse)* I don't think he is coming up this time, Abigail. *(Waking Kalamazoo up.)* Kala! Kala! Kala get up.

ABIGAIL: WAT [What] ?!

Dolly walks followed by Nolo.

DOLLY: *Keng jwale* [What now]?!

MUSA: *(Holding Kalamazoo's body)* He... he is dead.

DOLLY: *Oreng?! What did you say?*

ABIGAIL: I told him to *vag... noe hy'se doed.*

NOLO: Mama.

DOLLY: How did this happen? And why in my house Abigail... Musa? Do you know how much trouble this adds to my problems?

Musa and Abigail are stunt.

NOLO: What are we going to do, Ma? (Beat) Should I call po—

DOLLY: No! No one is calling the police.

MUSA: (*Scared*) They are going to take all of us to prison.

Abigail goes to check if there is anyone outside.

DOLLY: Stop right there. Everyone stay put.

ABIGAIL: Die is *nkwankwarush* [trouble], *Askies* Sis Dolly, *strueee!*

DOLLY: Will you all keep quite and let me think. (*Long silence*)

MUSA: I ... I think we should bury him.

DOLLY: *Eng* [What]?!

MUSA: (*Cold face*) Lets bury him in the back yard.

Dolly defeated takes a seat.

ABIGAIL: Dolly this is *jombafire*. [Trouble]

MUSA: We don't have a choice.

NOLO: We should call the police, they will understand, that it was a mistake, *a kere* Mama [Is it not]?

DOLLY: (*Worried*) This time they will take me for good.

ABIGAIL: Nolo, *gee my die* spade.

NOLO: Bu... but it was an accident, so they —

DOLLY: You don't understand. Van der Merwe is going to feast on me for years. This is what the system wants...

NOLO: Mama what are you talking about?

DOLLY: *(Lost)* I got away the first time... this time there wont be any way out.

ABIGAIL: Musa, come help me dig the whole.

DOLLY: What will I say to my husband about his brother?

MUSA: No one has to know.

ABIGAIL: I will cover the whole so well. No one will suspect anything.

MUSA: If he doesn't fit I will help you cut him into pieces.

DOLLY: He is already serving time for me and now his brother died under my roof.

NOLO: Mama, what are you saying?

ABIGAIL: Zoo, is jive, packed with *kak!*

MUSA: *(Cold)* We bury him with all his clothes. I will pack them.

DOLLY: Nolo, your father is going to blame me. I am dead.

ABIGAIL: Ja! And then we take off... like dust and vanish ...

NOLO: He has no reason to Mama, just tell him the truth.

ABIGAIL: *Re ya e khendla!* [Clean up] Then Spin out of —

NOLO: *(To Abigail & Musa)* So you two are going to just leave us to answer questions? And when people asks us where you two are wh—

MUSA: Tell them we have become ghost, that's what...

ABIGAIL: Just like So'ftown, *Kofifi style ...*

Abigail and Musa drag Kalamazoo's body out side. Dolly is lost crying none stop.

NOLO: Mama are you not going to stop them or...

DOLLY: I am finished.

NOLO: Ma!

DOLLY: Your father didn't just kill a man, you hear me. He did not kill a man... a boy your age wanted to shrink him into a midget.

NOLO: Mama... what's...

The scene goes back in time (almost like a flashback).

DOLLY: *(Beat)* There was pass raid and one white police sergeant with his two 'police boys' were demanding to see his passes like they do all African males.

POLICE: You, why are you sitting on your black arse? *(Beat)* *Waars jou PASS, kaffir* [Where is your pass]?

DOLLY: He dare not address your father in that tone...

POLICE: Come on, we haven't all day.

DOLLY: ... in front of me, so I bragged: 'my husband is older than you, you're just a boy'. The sergeant bawled at your father... ignoring me.

POLICE: Scratch your pass, and tax.

DOLLY: I was diminished; your father was too calm. But the gentle in his face unruffled mine. He pulled out his wallet and showed his documents.

POLICE: *Goed [good]*, you got your Pass certificate and tax receipt for the current year... but it doesn't change the fact that you still look like a monkey... Ha! Ha! Ha

DOLLY: Ha! Ha! Ha! (*Laughs hysterically*)

POLICE: (*Serious*) Jump the monkey jump... dance for the world and me. Ha! Ha! Ha!

DOLLY: Ha! Ha! Ha! His laughter grew in echoes as he enjoyed your father's humiliation. (*Beat*) My respect for your father disintegrated, crumbling into an inch-high heap of ashes that I could not face. I have seen such too many times. I saw it with my grandfather, my father and now my husband?!

NOLO: Stop! Mama, please stop talking.

DOLLY: (*sobbing*) You have to know, Nolo. You have to understand. The police boy who had insulted your father was found as a swollen mass broken flesh and blood, with no eyes or nose or mouth ...almost a motionless ball... with his head separated from his neck. Child these hands have killed. The system and my own blows have cursed this house.

NOLO: (*comforting*) Ssssssh! Mama. Don't say more.

DOLLY: Listen... So your father might not be here... but he took my space behind bars so you could have your mother. So I can feed you... cloth you ... so I do not miss your first day at school. So you keep quite... and let Abigail and Musa do their thing. And then you *stop* gallivanting the streets chasing boy. You ought to sit down and read, and learn and become a better woman than Abigail, Musa and me... and any woman in Sophiatown.

Lights fades on the sobbing, sniffing, singing Dolly in pain.

Song: Lefatshe Lena

Lefatshele le... ke letselang

Le nkisa dinaledi

Le ha tsela e nkimela

Le ntsha dikeledi X2

Spotlight picks on Nolo.

NOLO: Feeling the pain in my mother voice. I searched for some sort of a parting in the earth that I could crawl into and huddle up into a ball of shame.

Dolly starts to sings.

Ha nkeke ka lelahla

Ke tlale atlarela ka matso...

Lefatshele le... ke letselang

Le nkisa dinaledi

Le ha tsela e nkimela

Le ntsha dikeledi X2

Lights fade but with one staying on Nolo

NOLO: That was the last time I saw Musa or Abigail... they were like pain and suffering intertwined by life? They left together with

itching wounds... left us with whatever was remaining in
Sophiatown. (*Breaks into a song.*)

Suffer

I suffered

Suffered alone

Do you know...

What its like

To see chunks of flesh fall out

... To have your

People fight each other

Like monsters

I suffered

Suffered alone

SCENE TWELVE

Next day: There is a rumbling thunder outside, as we hear walls tumbling down from a distant.

DOLLY: Can you smell it? They are here.

NOLO: He is a good boy Ma.

DOLLY: Who?!

NOLO: You know who I am talking about. *(Pause.)* We love each other.

DOLLY: It doesn't change anything.

NOLO: Soften your heart, Ma. *(Beat.)* You don't want me to be happy.

DOLLY: I don't want you to hurt.

NOLO: But you are already hurting me.

DOLLY: You my girl.

NOLO: Raised by a good strong black woman...

Fiki walks through the door with luggage and a crying baby in hand.

FIKI: Is he here?

DOLLY: He is at work. Has he not been home again?

FIKI: How can you ask me when you keep all of them here, while we are busy raising their children alone?

DOLLY: ... Ai! These men.

FIKI: But I know he will come here at some point.

Fiki holds her baby tight; gives her a kiss and then places the baby and the rest of her bags on top of the tables next to Dolly.

DOLLY: What are you... doing?

FIKI: I am leaving his child where he will find her.

DOLLY: But where are you going?

FIKI: *(Teary)* To a place where I can be alone and live my life free like Bloke does.

DOLLY: Come down Fiki, a mother can't leave a child with a man...

FIKI: It's his child too. I am tired of being a woman in waiting, while Bloke is living his life without a care of how his child or me are doing.

DOLLY: But ...

Bloke and Can walk through the door bit drunk.

BLOKE: FIKI... my Fiki.

Fiki without looking at him goes to the baby again, smiles down at her with teary eyes.

BLOKE: *Hao!* What is going on?

DOLLY: What does it look like? The woman is tired Bloke.

Fiki about to walk pass Bloke.

BLOKE: *(Helpless)* You can't leave the child here. You have a responsibility...

FIKI: *(Firm tone)* Don't we both have the responsibility to be ourselves? Because if we are not the sort of people we want to be, then how can we be the people we want to be for her, Uhu?

BLOKE: ... *(puzzled)*

FIKI: *(To the child)* Listen her Chris, I can't make you happy... and mummy is not happy herself. So you grow up and be a good strong girl for both you and I.

Fiki walks off with everyone dump founded.

BLOKE: *(Defeated)* Is she serious Sis Dolly.

His head buried between his hands.

DOLLY: Ai! Bloke, you men can't always think women will always be waiting for you, to make up your minds.

BLOKE: I know... I know Sis Dolly. But she is leaving me.

DOLLY: No! She already left you.

Lights fade followed by collective voice singing:

Hey... yeye... hey...

Hey la hey... yeye

Haaaaaa! Hela! Hela!

Haiiiiiii! Hela! Hela!

Thari e ntsho

Thari ya setso

Khotso selala, ke lala ke salala x 2

SCENE THIRTEEN

Few days later: Nolo walks in with stacks of boxes. Dolly starts packing out plates and cutlery. We hear sounds of bulldozers outside. A distance from Dolly's house someone screams, another throws insults at the police and the other is crying hysterically.



NOLO: Mama, the fridge and kitchen drawers are going to take up too much space.

DOLLY: There is a space for you at the back of a truck. I can sit in front.

NOLO: *(Change of thought)* You know, Casey's mother's house was crushed with her most expensive *imbuya* wood, bedroom suit. The bloody bulldozer threw down the bricks of her home with that bed inside. Imagine.

DOLLY: How many glasses in that box?

NOLO: *(Counts)* More than 30.

DOLLY: *(Picking a vase)* How much do you think I can sell this for? First we must wash them clean

NOLO: *(Taking her clothes out of the room divider)* Mama, my clothes don't fit in one suitcase... I need two.

DOLLY: Go ask Dr Mahomed down the road, if he has any extra box.

NOLO: There's no one at the house anymore.

DOLLY: Then make sure you take only what you need.

NOLO: I already left half my wardrobe in there.

DOLLY: *(Looking around)* I bet I can get a pound for each chair in here at least.

NOLO: No one will buy anything, Mama. Everyone is no longer in their homes.

DOLLY: *(Stopping to pack)* Are they really gone?

NOLO: Yes, they left.

DOLLY: Where did they go?

NOLO: I take it they are going where we are going. *(Beat)*

DOLLY: *(Unsettled)* So-Where- To. *(Long silence)* It's better to move than watch the walls of your home crumble like dust.

NOLO: *(Whipping of sweat)* They have been driving up and down since 5am. They will be here in an hour.

DOLLY: They want us out by noon.

Nolo moves to the window to watch the bulldozers.

NOLO: *(Still looking through the window)* Bulldozers are ugly. You can see them from right here, no need to even be by the street.

DOLLY: I don't want to look at them, close the curtains and come finish packing.

Nolo doesn't respond.

DOLLY: Your father said I must say hello to you.

NOLO: Yes you told me. Did he ask about Kalamazoo?

DOLLY: He did.

NOLO: And what did you say...

DOLLY: *(Sad beat)* Just that he is gone. I don't know if he understood me... or he took it that Kalamazoo left Sophiatown.

NOLO: Is uncle Can coming with us?

DOLLY: He is in his room with his head buried inside a bottle.

NOLO: Uncle Bloke already left the country. Did he tell you?

DOLLY: I couldn't even give your father our new address... *(Change of thought)* maybe I should cook? Do you think we will have time to eat?

NOLO: If all of them left *Drum* who is going to write this story.

Dolly lost for words.

NOLO: Will he ever come back mama?

There is a sound of a truck outside Dolly's house. Soon we hear a truck hooter.

DOLLY: Your father my child? You mean in our lifetime? *(Long pause)*
When the sunsets, another street will be gone... It takes them
10 minutes to destroy the memory of a living home. How do
they do that?

Dolly frantically gets down on her hands and knees washing the floor and scraping the walls. The truck outside is hooting louder and louder. Dolly crying, her tears fall to the ground... she doesn't stop scraping. A chorus of singing people is heard from a distance.

Lashoni langa
Lashoni langa, se ngalibona...

NOLO: Whatever else Sophiatown was, it was home; we made the
desert bloom; made alterations, converted half-verandas into
kitchens, decorated the houses and filled them with music. We
were house-proud.

Lashoni langa
Lashoni langa, se ngalibona...

We took ugliness of life in a slum and wove a kind of beauty;
we established bonds of human relationships, which set a
pattern of communal living, far richer and more satisfying-
materially and spiritually-than any model housing could
substitute.

Mhlaba Wethu
Mabayek'umhlaba Wethu. . .
Thina Sizwe. . . □

Nolo picks her mother from the floor; she still doesn't want to leave. But Nolo holds her as she cries.

NOLO: Mama, I will write to Papa and give him our new address. And maybe next time when you go see him I should come with you.

DOLLY: *(Sobbing)* Oho! Nolo my child ... your words stand for so much more than a happy beat. You are growing so fast. Your father would rather see you... than to see the end of Sophiatown.

*Thina Sizwe 'simnyama . . . Sikalele
Sikalela Izwe Lethu Elathathwa . . .
Elathathwa Ngabamhlophe. . .
Mabaw'yeke. . . Mabayek 'umhlaba Wethu. . .*



THE END...

Heartbeat of The Rain

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ABSTRACT

My poetry collection fuses Sesotho and English, often within the same poem, as a way of showing how I live within and between two cultures. I write to celebrate these two tongues without compromising either language and allow each poem, to express its own musical component, tone, rhythm, and pace as it moves between stage and page. My poems converse about difficult subjects from a feminine voice. They look at family structures and dynamics, using everyday household things as metaphors. They take on deep family narratives of generational curses, births, deaths and love. There are also some more political poems about community outrage, the exploitation caused by outmoded culture and tradition, and about the nightmare that constantly wants to come out of the township.

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RAIN DRIPS FROM OUR BODIES

We are the granddaughters
Of *Baloyi* — the witches
You were not able to burn
We are as numberless as ants in the soil
We are vultures and crows
That feed on other birds' meat
Hills on whose slopes cattle graze and sing

We are the granddaughters
Of the blanketed ones, *Basotho*
We dance to untangle the clouds
Make rain drip from our bodies
As our feet kiss the soil

From the roots of our hips
Trees grow
We are brave and strong
And child-like

We are granddaughters of things to come
Rumours of things gone by
River full with slippery stones
We are carriers of stories
Holders of memories
Tellers of our own history

We are fire
Behind us a wake of smoke unfurls
Our wings split the sky
Our grassy hair swayed by gusts of wind
We are the smell of the cow-dung
Crowned with moonlight

Re-Baloyi...Re ya loya

NTSOANA-TSATSI

(The origin place of the Basotho people)

Dark waters

Tall reeds,

Ntsoana-Tsatsi... you are told:

This is where your people come from

A dream world child

Born with three eyes

One in your head

Is to walk through the main door

To take the byroad

And be hurled out into the world as a gift

This ... your home village

Founded by *Mokholokwe e Moholo, Wetsi*

Son of the *Batlokoa* and *Bakwena*

He who is greater than us

With no cunning net

To fish any possibilities

Than what life gives

Still ...

Ntsoana-Tsatsi whispering infinite winds

Teaches you to spread your hope

Its ginger *Botjhabela* sun

Thrives in your childhood

Reminding your muddy feet

To move out of the dry bush

And grow

To soothe

To rouse

To croon revolt

And dream you as its freedom

How can you then
An irreducible daughter of *Bakwena*
View its life
From the back of your head
Forget that, there inside it
Exist the sacred *Motoulleng* caves
Well-sculptured cracks of *Maralla* hills
Fikapatso valleys gaping holes
Perfectly wet *Sekoto* creeks
And *Metsi Matsho* riverbanks
Where the great water snake resides

How can you then, a Mosotho daughter
Born out of great-grandmother's dreams
Bearing the name *Napo Wa Bahlakoana*
Forget that, there at the foot of Ntsoana-Tsatsi
Rests a sublime prayer
Secrets of *Mantsopa*, the Prophetess
Who saw in her dream:

A swarm of white butterflies
Coming over the seas
Going through the land
Chewing the lands,
With fingers that spit out fires
Eating all people alive...

Ntsoana-Tsatsi
Where *Makhomokhomo* people of great cattle
Painted images from spirit world
Ntsoana-Tsatsi
Land of *mme-moholo le bo ntate-moholo*
Where I learnt to smile ceaselessly
To stay alive
As songs of *Dingaka*
Nestle at the feet of its gigantic sandstone

DITSOEJANE

(Girls from Initiation School)

From 'Mountain Of The Night'

Ba leta *Thojane* looking all one with earth

Ditsoejane, like statues cut from rock

Coming down from the neighbouring hillside

In demure, beaded, embroidered

Tanned leather garments,

Wearing moving grass skirts,

Bird feathers and adornment on straw costumes

Giving signs of fertility

Carrying inside them, *Dikoma tsa Basotho, Mangae*

Silently crying out, pleading with ancestors

Tau ya tswa mohlakeng

Motseng, on mothers' waists rest *Ditjobo*,

Strung together to give a percussive backing

Ditsoejane thrusting in chorus their buttocks in *Ditolobonya*

Shoulders and necks

Forward and backward shifting in *Mokhibo*

Turning, to dance

Singing *Dipina tsa Tantsi*

Crouching in a tight circle

Hands in the air

Beating their thighs

Basotho men embodying a deep-bass thunder of the rain,

Like in *Morokotlo* war dance

Grumbling in a low growling deep-throated chorus

Beneath a high-pitched leader's voice is heard

Fathers are ridding the earth ka *Mohobela*

Capturing the spirit of being a Mosotho

Bashemane spit out the sun

Making the sound of *Morothlwane* to come alive

Rubbed and covered in pale red chalk
Neither of the animal nor vegetable world
These are future diviners
Ba-Tebuka with rattles tied to their ankles
Manyenenyene bells joined on strings to follow the sacred dancing
Khoi- ora, *Lesiba* with harsh, bird-like tone
Can be heard from herd boys
Behind the east-facing hills
Not far away *Rakgadi* is playing *Sevuruvuru*
Against dark forces
She is evoking the ancestors
And from the realm of solidarity
Bo-Mme ululate
'iiiiiiiiiiii, iiiiiiiiiiiii, iiiiiiiiiiiiii!'

It's an all day feast
Meropa echo out self-praise songs
Held at the end by *Thojane* ritual
Two by two
Ditsoejane with wooden spears in hand
Enter *Lekgotla* to receive blessing from the Chief
"Motho ke Motho ka Batho"
Leaving the royal house with limbs smeared in different pigments
They shake the village ground with pride
Ke motjeko fela
Ho ya qoqopelwa
Ke bo-mothonthonyane

Passing reed fences and mud walls
Hae Lapeng, friends and family sing *Difela le Famo*
A cow sacrificed like a mortal is hanging on a central tree
The smell of *Papa le Nama*
Sorghum beer, *M'gombothi*
Mafi sour milk; fills the air
We are all in awe of the gods

Malome with *Modianyewe* grass hat

Erupts with end-blown harmonic flute, *Lekodilo*

Changing the pitch with his fingers

Opening and closing

Opening and closing

Breathing to choose his notes

Calling and responding

Calling and responding

Matwela- Ramatwetwe, a traditional healer fully-fledged

Is leading all initiates with *Hlophe* word-music

(The ultimate consciousness)

These girls from the ‘Mountain Of The Night’

Are welcomed into a village of womanhood with *Thoko-ya-Dithoko*

Display *Bo-Kheleke ba bona* with verbal fineness

As preludes to being ‘Water Calabash’

‘iiiiieeeee, iiiieeeee, iiiieeeee!’

HEARTBEAT OF THE RAIN

Motlalepula, the one who came with the rain
O pula ya medupe, the curving summer rain
O'ya lelemela, traveling through things
O lelemela, O theo'a dipororo, to find the river you belong to
O tlatsa didiba le diqanthani, flooding wells and lakes
O tlatsa dinoka le dinokana, downpour over brooks and rivers
Ke bua le ka yona melatswana, even the very same thin brooks

Naked with protruding belly
I, your mother, breathing in and out

'One, two, three'

Outside the world going by
Trees greeting the rain
Birds running
Insects vanishing
Earthworms crawling up
Water running down runnels
Fast, rising above the land
Streets turning into mud
Flooding the earth
Everything soaking

Next explosion a blinding flash

Midwife screaming

'Close the window'

Aunty yelling

'Lock that door'

Grandma shouting

'Cover the mirrors'

And I, your mother

Breathing in God

Breathing out life

'One, two, three'

It's a new season
Modjadji, the Rain Queen
Like me is singing her secrets

Last explosion
Releasing you from my womb
And I, your mother
Holding your wrinkled body
Smiling,
And your father
A descendent of *Basena, Bamwenye, Balemba*
Hearing the sound of your first tears, said:
*'Heaven should not unleash too much
Otherwise everything will be the ocean'*

Sun, you came with the rain
Ke wena Pule wabo Puleng le Pulane, abundance of diamonds
Motlalepula, the one who came with the rains
O pula ya medupe, the curving summer rain
O'ya lelemela, traveling through things
O lelemela, O theo'a dipororo, to find the river you belong to
O tlatsa didiba le diqanthani, flooding wells and lakes
O tlatsa dinoka le dinokana, downpour over lakes and rivers
Ke bua le ka yona melatswana, even the very same thin brooks

Note: Rain is such a strong symbol in Sotho culture that children born on a rainy day are given rain-names such as Pule, Pulane, Puleng, Motlalepula. The rain is also a sign of a blessing, new beginnings, but at times this can be a curse like a flood, destroying what is already in existence.

MY FATHER'S GARDEN

My father's garden grows in me
My eyes his roses
With each petal a page
Of black beaded story
Rooted in grubby gold
And broken diamonds
Each chapter
A touch of beauty and sorrow
Held by the hand of silent memory
Sparkling spider webs that bind my life
With all those who sprout
On our family tree

Dark brown face ...
Flickering images
Thick eyebrows ...
Diving boards against stormy currents
Far reaching eyelashes ...
Sweeping paths before me
Pointed and sharp English nose ...
A taste of delicate whisper
Diminutive lips ...
Wings that carrying my mother's tongue
Hanging ornaments, ears ...
Butterflies treading on a soft valley
Cheekbones ...
Dimple edges of petals
Forehead ...
A shield that houses my divine third eye
Well-rounded chin ...
Covering small freckles
Kinky spiral dreadlocked hair ...
Keeping foliage seasons

Growing out of me

My father's garden grows in me

Watered to womanhood

By the heart of a woman

Who carries the ocean in her womb

I am she, who swims backwards

To drown in the culture of my ancestors

MY BANTUSTAND

If your childhood was not carved by this place, Qwaqwa
You will not possess snapshots of
Boys hanging around street corners,
Playing dice, jobless
While girls mind strings of hungry babies
The most educated are schoolteachers, nurses and police officers
Since 1970's houses are still tiny brick blocks,
Warm against the winter weather,
Hot like an open oven in summer
The middle class extends their homes, adding a bathtub
A geyser or extra bedroom.
The rich employ helpers and child minders,
From villages that rest against *Maluti* Mountains
30th of the month or just before 25th December,
Hand-me-down sofas, sheets and utensils carefully packed,
Are shipped via death-trap taxis from the township
To a muddy house somewhere

There is a sad pride,
A weary shadow about this old Bantustand
The most privileged build a double-storey house
Next door to the extremely dilapidated shack
The unexplained are children,
Who fly words from the same textbook,
Chant inside one church,
Play *diketo le morabaraba*,
Sing *makolilo, famo le difela*
Dance *mokgibo, mohobelo, ditolobonya le moqoqopelo*

In my hometown politics are a promise
For anyone ...
Who can hold a politician's face on their chest
Many of us grew up here

Dreaming of a life when we would learn
To tie our smudged school shoes,
Read and write to escape the dust
While others wait only to know when
To spit between hands,
Take deep breaths, flex muscles, step outside
To live history all over again

PIECES OF ME

I am looking for parts of me
Stones that drowned in the floods
Scattered inside storms
Smashed lips bitten to build a dam of swords
Scared silent rains
Broken into thousand bundles

My tired leaves
Are happiness buried
A gentle time bruised
Those damaged particle
Of my spoiled demise

Has anyone seen
Found pieces of me
Held by time that rose from my footprints

FLOOD

Death has rested loudly on my family

Another one of us

'We should not ask who's next'

Has packed his soul too soon

Without a note

It's like that

When death walks into a home

Sits round the dinner table

While in the next room

The souring sick in bed

Smile

As if they are about to catch

A last ride somewhere

And insist you close the door on them

But you, their big sister, scared

Look down from the sky

Not whispering or shouting

To eavesdrop on their conversation:

'I might have to leave

Broken hearts behind weeping'

We are the ones

Who keep coming and going

Like twisted waves

To rest right at the grey seashore

We are the living and

The dying

We are the haunted ones

With fate spinning

Our lives into a web

AFTER MY FATHER'S DEATH

I grew up
Seeing my mother
Behind the door
At the edge
Of her once shared bed
Dressed in black
Kneeling
Trembling with sorrow
Alone
A widow
Her hands locked together
Shaking
Whispering
Tears soaking her open Bible
Hurting
Not knowing how she would
Raise three children
Wondering
How could it have been
That a thin tie
Hooked to the roof of a sweet home
Dangled her husband like a bell
Sucking life out of his soul
Her voice
I heard
Breaking harshly
Between her fingers
Piecing freely
I saw
Silently
Many times
Sweat mixed with tears
Dripping life from her face

Slipping down her black arms

Resting on her black mourning clothes

And still my mother never stopped praying

RESTING PLACE

I steered my blue Citi Golf
Along the dusty road
Heading for the funeral of *Rangwane* - uncle on my father's side
His body was on its way to his ancestral place, Qwaqwa

Squashed in my back seat were two older uncles - *Boramokgolo*
Who said nothing to *Rangwane's* two wives
But murmured from time to time
Holding a short leafy branch - *sehlahla*
Which had collected *Rangwane's* spirit
No one invited *Lerato*,
The woman *Ragwane* had been living with in Jo'burg
She was nothing - but a *nyatsi*

Boramokgolo were forbidden to talk to anyone alive
So they kept talking to the spirit-laden branch
Telling *Rangwane*
Which landmarks we were passing
The sienna-red plowed earth we were seeing
The silk-fringed mealies
Standing as high as our eyes
On either side of the road
Muddy ugly brown farmhouses
Where women in bunchy cotton dresses
And sunbonnets stared after the car
They murmured, for they knew
If they failed to do so
Rangwane's spirit would be left along the way
And bring bad luck to our family

At my grandmother's house, *Bohlokong*
Rangwane's two wives were in isolation
Wrapped in black mourning

Sitting on a mattress in a bare candle-lit room,
Waiting for the body to enter

My blue Citi Golf rolled into the yard
Ramokgolo got out, softly said to the spirit-laden branch
 "You are home my son.
 The whole family is here to meet you
 Before you rest on your forefathers land forever"

I was instructed to bring *moqombothi*
Ramokgolo took off his blazer
Rolled up his sleeves
Lifted the calabash, poured the beer on the floor
Commanded *Rangwane's* spirit to drink

That night the mourners filled the tent
That stood outside the house
Singing hymns throughout the wake
And when the night had fallen
Rangwane was buried well next to my grandfather
Over the golden hill

When the moonlit night was most beautiful
And all the wolves were out in the wild
And all mourners had taken their leave
Tension built in the house
Lamplights cast pacing shadows on walls
Angry accusing voices reaching the roof
Someone stole *sehlahla*
They are going to use my uncle's spirit
To control our ancestors

Years later we heard
It was *Lerato*, the *nyatsi*
Who took my *Rangwane's* spirit back to Jo'burg

THABA E WELE

(For my brother Thabo)

Thaba e wele, re mahlaba
Re meutlwa, re hlabilwe
Se p'shatlehile se jana se setle
Se betsehile fatshe dikotwana
Feela ha ho kang
Rona dibata re setse,
Re setse le dinkgo di re
Tshela ka metsi

Phumulang dikgapha lona baha Masheane
Dikeledi ha di busi moya nameng
Le ha letsatsi le tshhile ka lona
Mmopi wa rona, Tlatla Matjholo, Rara- Ramasedi
O mokgethile le yena
Leha bohloko bo lebatsa
Motho ho rapela
Dipelaelo ha dina matshidiso

Ngwaneso mahlomola ho hlomola
O kgutsitse tu!
Motloheleng, molokolleng
Tahlehelo ha se ya rona fela
Ke ya matjhaba le ditjhaba
Ke ya didiba le madiboho

E nyametse Kwena kwetseng lehodimong
E rahile leqhamu ya bitoha
E se e le tebello ya lehodimo
E sekamisitse mokokotlo ntja ya mmé

Wena Kwena e tona
Jara o tlame thoto ya hao

Wena Motebang- Neo Ya Bahlakoana Mailangwathela
Motho a sajeng sengwathwana sa maobane
Wena ngwana wa Napo wabo Mosito
Mohlakwana wa Pholo ya Disema
Ha dinoka le dinokana
Matamo le matangwana
Didiba le madiboho
Ao amohle
Ao busetse hlakeng...Mohlakwana

Note: It is hard to do a direct translation of the above poem. It is an ode to my brother who passed away. The musical wording in it is infused with our clan names and to translate each line I would be taking from it the core of its soul and the beauty of my language.

HOUSE OF WAR

These words echo for those
Whose vocal chords have been plaited into knots
They are for every chair that has lost its arms and legs
For the empty kitchen table with stained tablecloth
Water glasses that have jumped to their death
Drawers that watch with opened mouths
Forks and spoons that chant
Tiles peeled up from the floor
They are for broken plates and unplugged fridge,
And the old broom locked in the cabinet

These words echo for men and women
Whose voices have scattered all over the room
They are for every sofa that has been torn apart
Earmarked for the dump
Bodiless clothes that hang hopelessly
From the wardrobe
For a treasure bruised in smiles
A ceiling that streamed with bleach
And black doorframes split into two

These words echo for every dog that has stopped howling
For chickens that are too thin to scratch or peck
But which are slaughtered anyway
Children's laughter drowned in a tubful of milk
For every sheet stolen from the washing line
The tree that washed off its soundless leaves
Buried them below its feet

After enough words
We should no longer echo
But remember that
The war in this house is our own

THE KITCHEN

In the whistle of a pressure cooker
The clutter of chores
The clash of dishes
There's a crack on the floor
It's in the middle of the kitchen
A novilon pathway to the life
Of a lonely woman
Scuffmarks
Where chairs have been pulled across the room
Scratches where my tears fell
There's dirt
Whether carried in from outside
Or prolonged by a weary heart

My hands urge
The knitted crochet tablecloth
To dance with plates
So we can search each other
For the aroma of spices
In the colour of vegetables
Watch as spoons smile up at me
Forks frown with their sharp points
Knives, the most vicious of all
Break out of the drawer's mouth

All of us
In the richness of gravy
And salads
And glasses of fermented wine
Will not remember
The rest of this night

RUNNING FOOTSTEPS

The primus stove
Purring softly with steaming pot
My sister and me
Lounging in the blankets
Silently boycotting the winter cloth
Over blissful *Thaba di Mahlwa*
The enticing smell of meat, potatoes and curry
Makes me think of *di-chomie tsa ka*

Then we hear running footsteps
Are startled out of our reverie
My mother trips over a strip of wood
And falls
He thunders in
She keeps to her knees
He takes her by her blouse
Lands the pot in the middle
Of her skull
With a heavy *gong* sound
She struggles to loosen from his grip
Screaming, crying into the night
Flees

BLUES FOR BLUE

(Inspired by Noni Limar's voice)

Soon after they got married

Blue realized he was a liar

Four children down

She couldn't tell

When he was lying

Or if he was a professional

A well-built chord progression man

With a dark face

Broad nose

Aggressive hands

That could make any jazz track sound like

Poverty

Absence

Headache

Those twelve-bar notes bent so easily inside his mouth

Singing misery out

Like magical blues

With flat pitch major scale

But he couldn't charm her anymore

She was submissive

But not stupid

Things were disappearing

Pots, pans

Spoons, plates

Even taps

Leaving early

Coming late

Stumbling in breath smelling like hot trumpets

Trying to kiss her

Like those lyrical bass lines

She would pull away

Day in and day out
Sweat dripping down
Big circles around his armpits
Blue blues washed and pressed on
Distant and cold
Still he listened
To jazz drowning him
Those blaring horns

One Sunday afternoon
She heard
From some woman in church
About jazz musicians and that junk
But he was not a musician
Just a listener
Humming laughter into his own pain
Just a lonely black man
With too much time on his hands

Next Saturday
The wise old aunt came
Blue told her about him
Passed out sleeping
They crept in
Fused their fingers
In and out of his pockets
And there it was
Whoonga
Rolled up in a foil

I have seen enough, said Blue
She began planning her exit
Stopped looking him in the eyes

Stopped cooking what he liked
Stopped wearing her perfume
Stopped putting on make up
When he would try and put his heaviness on her
She would fight
Put her fists in his back

The following night
Engulfed with guitar twang
And gripping voice of the Blues singer
He placed his gun on the side of the bed
Switched the radio on
Made her do it
She didn't want to
She cried, screamed, protested
But he placed his big arms on that gun
Told her, *you are mine*

That bedtime gun song
Gave birth to a child
Of a bitter black man
Who loved his Blues notes
More than his Blue

Those walking bass major scales
Those trace like rhythms
With their repetitive effects
Those electric sounds
That shuffle out
Through *Whoonga* groove

FAMILY WEDDING

One Christmas season
My aunt was getting married
The cow was killed in the backyard
The house smelled of home-baked cakes
The iron steel stove
Blazing with black coals was
Over cooking lamb meat into *Tjhotlo*
My fat yellow-boned *Gogo* was priding herself
On making the best *Ting*
Borakgadi, Bomalome and Motswala
Brought so many blankets, calabashes, brooms and grass mats
To present to the in-laws
One old man among other grey heads
Asked me what standard I was in
Proudly I replied
 ‘*Standard Six*’
Cheerfully he told me I was already a teacher
I asked him:
 ‘*Who wants to be a teacher*
 And teach Maths, Biology and Geography in Sesotho?’
He laughed so much
I swear beer spat out, ran off his belly

Mama was boiling corn
Water frothed over the stove and hissed
When suddenly a swamp of girls
From *Botshabela* – where the sun rises appeared
Like dusty storm before the rainbow
They crushed through the crowded yard
Landed straight inside the kitchen
Took her wooden cooking spoon
From a huge black pot of *papa*
My alcoholic *Mamane* threw insults like stones at them

But they ran leaving their shadows behind
That big *morula* tree
Standing like a choirmaster across the river

Soon the air smelled of soil
The sky wrapped itself with a blue cloudy shawl
Looking heavy and sad
My bride-to-be aunt started to cry
I asked:

‘*Why?*’

She said:

‘*The stolen wooden spoon had black magic.*’

And without it in the house
The gods were going to be upset
And make rain grow from their eyes

My fat yellow-boned *Gogo* asked for my old shoe
Insisted on carrying it on her back
Like how I carry my too thin
Too well dressed up Barbie doll
For three hours my *Gogo*
Sang and danced till the sky shed her grey coat
Then a real wedding song erupted from the crowd
Led by my tall *Mamalome*

Basadi ululated:

‘iiiiieeeee, iiiieeeee, iiiieeeee!’

My aunt, the bride, came out looking like:
Ngwana ya tshwanang le le-coloured
Stepped out to marry
Her childhood sweetheart from the mines

QWAQWA SUN

It's not your girly sun
Shining with its bright muddy teeth
Over a sweeping expanse
Of proud shallow hills
Dotted with fat dancing trees

It's not your clouds outside
In their smoky thickets
Drifting by
Looking fragile and shy

It's not your clay soil
Beautiful like a baby's giggle
Clothed in pink, mauve and yellow flowers
Or your red caved mountainous view
Green in their clean new sunlight

It's the beauty in the eye
That makes you so lovable
Not that soft line of brownness
Which sometimes strikes across
Your people's dimpled faces
It's the splendor of your ample sky
Which turns your drabness into gold

It's your barely unfinished homes
Lit by paraffin lamps
It's your dirty olive walls that flake away
To show the plaster underneath
It's the decoration
Of a crude four colour calendar of dreams
The murky picture
Of a stern pious grandmother

In a heavy oval frame
The wobbly wardrobe
Or human shadows mirrored against the wall
Or boxes of life
That lifts me up... making my soul dance

VILLAGE SINGER

She wore an enormous red dress
From her brought brown shoulders
Her head emerged like a sculpted bust
Hewn like a rounded *knobkirie*
Polished from soft earthly stone
Her thick curly Afro hair
Held around by *Ndebele* beads
Stood brutally from her forehead
She stood self-erect on high heels
Like a Saartjie Baartman statue
Poised with busted dignity
Her tinsel earrings discontinuous
In the light against her shadowy, flat ears

Then her face lit up the area
Her eyes sparked life
While her every limb sprang into jingle movement
She leaned forward on her red painted toes
Heaved her jam-packed breast forward
Lifted her life-size arms
With fingers tense, ready to strangle

She stood there
With her expressive roving eyes
Gave a naughty smile
Let out a tiny high-pitched giggle
Then placed her hands on her mouth
In mimicked shame
Looked quickly around the room
No longer on her pedestal
But as a warm peasant girl
Unblemished
Unprotected among her people

Then her mouth opened as wide as a whale
Her massive lips quivered
And ruptured into a wave of songs

RAIN DANCER

Like music falling on fields and trees
She begins with ritual slowness,
Stamps fire into her loins
Takes on a strange enchanted glow
Storms like an umbrella in the sky
She hurls her hunger
Bleeds doubts
Engraves a loud whole
And prays to the moon around her

She owns fire
Spins her enigma around us
Pulls us into a redolent perfumed dance
Dissolves the boundaries of her body
To become a wild force
As she glows in her death
As a murky frail woman

See a tapper in the roof shadows
A flamenco dancer
Lurking under a silhouette
Preparing with terror
Her angel wings
As if someone wounded her with words

She is a small ripple of corn
Splashed between pavement cracks
Glowing in her tears
Forcing all of us
Her crying feathers
To die in her crystal lava dance

NIGHT CLUB

Stone-faced figures around the room
Sprung to life like puppets lifted off their perch
Eyes lighting up
Feet beating time
Clapping as one person
Wailing, zigzagged through the tune
Blowing imaginary trombones
Twanging non-existing guitars

Like an epileptic
Consumed by the beat
She was lost to the world around
Her tongue sliding between her teeth
Contorted in a grimace
She was grinning and gasping
In a crazy silent conversation
Jiving
Moving
Filling up the floor

YEARNING TO BREAST FEED

I know a woman in Soweto
Who empties the *zink*
Polishes slippery smooth floors
Washes gauzy curtains
Cleans off dirt rings around the bath
Soaks holey panties with her cracked hands
Pays attention to tiny cracks in the kitchen
Makes beds and sandwiches for a living

Stripped of her birth name
 U'sisi, Aunty, So & So
Some call her nanny, cook, helper
 Again So & So
Don't know what her wage is
She irons our egos
Wakes up at 5am, every day
Serves tea in bed at 7am
Before we slip into our elegant cars
This house secretary is deprived
Of mothering her own children
So ours can have their beds made
Square-nosed shoes polished

This sister So & So
Is not asking anything from the world
 Simply,
Her job is to dress madam's face with a smile
 Nanny, cook, helper, So & So

The madam says:
 *"Let's keep her pounding soul
 So she blows out husks in our rice
 Picks out weevils from our beans*

Peels onions and grinds pepper”

I know this woman

She has been my grandmother

My mother

My aunt

My neighbour

And now, she too is my helper

Day by day

She walks with,

Tamed and tangled hope around her neck

Mud sweat, dripping blood

Spirit crushed

Worked to death

Yearning to breastfeed her home

Where she too can be free

TOWNSHIP CHURCH WOMEN

For a moment with eyes shut
See old blind *Mmatladi*
Tapping her way along the street
In the dark
Which has been hers for years
Always, half an hour before the early Mass,
She will be there in church,
Prostrate in prayer.

Some Sunday mornings,
There will be old *Mmazwane*
She has spent all her years
(At least all those that are known),
Mending sacks and inhaling cement dust
Into her old lungs,
She is never free from a fierce cough
Lives in someone's back room

Then there is *Mmamokoena*
Day after day,
Spending an hour or more
Before the statue of Our Lady,
Which she has never seen,
And if I stopped her in the street
She greets with that wonderful smile
That lifts her sightless eyes to my face

Also remember *Mmamokete*,
A few years ago she fell and broke her hip
Now has to fight her way
On to the early-morning bus with a crutch
Had a wonderful flow of language,
Her epithets not always

What you might expect
From a devout and faithful old lady
Very much a product of the old Sono Road,
Were it not for her broken hip
She would sing and dance to
 “ *Indaba ya kabani*
 Ngi lahlu Mlenze”
With the best of them.

NONTSOKOLO'S CHILDREN

Music rose to a pitch as Nontsokolo

Sang:

Hamba, Hamba, Nontsokolo

E'goli, E'goli,

Hamba, Hamba, Nontsokolo

E'goli, E'goli

Hamba! Nontsokolo E'goli

To feed the hunger in her womb

Knowing her seed

Would be laid to waste

At the mere mention of its beauty

She vowed she would protect her children

From shining too bright

By telling them:

How ugly they are

So, she dimmed the light of their dreams

Lest the vultures come for them

In the night

Breast-fed their fears

So that their moment of innocence

Could not be snatched

Amid the desperation of poverty

Because this life would not contain

Their souls

But Nontsokolo's children

Have become smiles

Of every township street corner

They are the bulls and dogs

A peril to future bliss

Eyes burning with anger

They can stick a knife and not miss

These boys and girls
Wrapped inside spirituality
Born out of sweat alcohol-infused bodies
That have dubious beginnings
But a sure end

They twist and tap on dance floors
Squeezing out every inch of life they can
Mothers, Fathers, Pimps, Tsotsies, Mpimpis
Divas, Shebeen Queens, Call Girls
Township intellectuals —
For one night
Everyone squeezes into Nontsokolo's song
Crushed together, drowning in melodies with a struggle

Hamba, Hamba, Nontsokolo

E'goli, E'goli,

Hamba, Hamba, Nontsokolo

E'goli, E'goli

Hamba! Nontsokolo E'goli

WHERE TEARS GATHER TEARS

No 53, Fourth Avenue
Sodom Road, Gomorrah
Rats' out-number newborns
Block all sanitation
Cockroach flow gutters
Flies never go on strike

Here poverty is a silent sob
Hanging like a coat
Only three minutes from homelessness
Your feeble hands cannot hold a spoon
A good dinner is *papa le metsi a letswai*
Inside a six pile garbage dump
The only dividing thing
Between them and us is the Dead Sea

Sandton City's crystal mirrors glow on your face
Hours romancing your life like a painting
On their walls
Your wounds are forever bleeding
Even when you can smell the sweet baked bread
On the other side

Waking up
Surrounded by weed,
Nyaope man swung an axe on another
Chicken blood splattered
Where only yesterday children played
Mathini, mogusha, morabaraba le ma-dice

Two hours later sirens are heard
Slow motion police drive through dark alleys
Young girl stabbed by a kiss

Mother's screams pierce the sky

Tears gather tears

WALLS FALLING DOWN

I am tired of holding hands with a clock
That turns its back
And keeps moving forward without me
My neighbourhood has made it okay for me
To live in a three square, dingy, plastered hole — called RDP
Cause my life is a Reconstructed Development Program

My house is falling down on me
The roof has fallen on my children
The councilor, after persistent agitation
Sent three men to fix the place:
The plasterer knocked a big hole in the ceiling
Filled it with mud,
The carpenter nailed a board over
The hole in the floor,
The plumber stopped the leak in the kitchen
And made three new ones in worse places

I am tired of holding hands with a clock
That turns its back
And keeps moving forward without me
My neighborhood has made it okay for me
To live in an era of *nyaope*, hijackings
 Cheap guns, phone snatching, beat downs,
 Smash and grabs
 And... and... and
 Black books
 Black dolls
 Black music and
 ... black love
An old township of sins, poverty and rotten wealth

FLASHING LIGHT

Down the street
Everything bare
Girl playing with crushed tin cans
Boy making machine-gun sound
Old man with exhausted veins
Pumping on dried forehead
Stark shacks
Rusted zinc anodes
Stinking poisonous air
No escape from this life

It's our home
With its dusty, dirty, dingy roads
Slovenly shops
Sprawling and unplanned
Stretches of corrugated iron roofs

It's our heaven
With its fetid and unsanitary yards

It's our Jerusalem
Through the presence of its children
And their unspoil
Unassailable laughter
Which overcomes sorrow

It sparkles with life
The magnificent laughter
Expressed fitness
Lent hands to win daily struggles

IN MY MOTHER'S HOUSE

At twenty-three
My mother married my father,
A high-brown *Mosotho* teacher
From Lesotho with middle class dreams
Of driving a big Toyota Cressida
Being called 'Meneer!'
Raising his children to be medical doctors
One year later I was born, then my sister,
Followed by my brother
Then my mother was done making babies
It was my turn to grow up

My mother had a plan for her daughters
Her philosophy amounted to:
"I am not raising straat-maids"
My sister and I were to flaunt our intelligence
Cover our asses
Not wear red toenail polish,
That was for *Difebe le Matekatse*
No ankle bracelets
Multiple piercing
Or chemically intoxicated hair

Mother had a slogan:
*"Be known for your mind, banyana
Not your body"*

I concentrated on being radical and intense
Didn't think much of being endearing

But a nice boy said something sweet
"You my size, you are my kind"
I suddenly hopped to Smal Street, *Joburg*
Landed in *Carlton Centre*, Shopping Mall

To buy clothes that would make my mother blush
My first miniskirt
White spandex
Red suede heels and fake silk panties
My future husband stood over me
Made my head spin
My insides fluttered
He touched me in the most unexpected place,
And though I didn't know what a clitoris was
Or how it worked
I had my first taste of lust
As for my found King
He couldn't say enough about the wonders of
My delicious ass
He promised to love my butt
Forever and ever, Amen!

EROTIC DREAM

My bed silently witnessed our dance of ecstasy
You left your smell in my room,
If these walls could mirror us
Things we've done, would jump to speak
I remember ...
Your skin touching mine
Hips thrusting thighs, clit tight and hard
Shaft rising up to its glory
'Wait a minute!' don't spread me too wide

You left a note on my pillow
Between your words, I read your smile
I remember...
Your hands walking between my legs
Your lips touching my nipples
Fingertips exploring me, soaking in delight
Without contesting the desire
'I want you!' give me more

If my furniture could tell,
It would confess,
Your mouth greeting mine
My hungry tongue indulging in yours
Intoxicating with lust,
I could drink from you forever
Keep feeding myself with this poison
Sharing in this passion
'Please enter me!' I am yours

'Here take' the key to my heavens door
And like a silent dream,
Slipping quietly inside me
In and out

In and out

So I could moan, rock rhythmically with you

Moratuwa!

O waka, ke wa hao.... Re kaofela

Twisting and turning

T-w-i-s-t-i-n-g and t-u-r-n-i-n-g

Babe I like it... from behind

'Don't worry love, I am going to ride you to eternity'

Minutes later, my heart-beating shy

I admit, you have awakened my core

THE BEDROOM

I, unbuttoning my blouse,
Stepped into the bedroom.
I heard him moan.
Dropped my blouse to the floor,
He moaned again,
Then my bra.
Louder this time.
I slipped under the covers.
The sound of the bedsprings
Was a rhythmic song of passion
Building to a crescendo
As if to shake the plaster from the walls
Harder,
Stronger,
Thunderous,
With each thrust of his massive frame,
He gasped
And moaned with unrestrained pleasure.
Then, no longer able to contain himself,
Burst into ecstasy
And relief.
It exploded against
The thinly insulated bedroom ceiling.
Leaving long echoes of sentences
Punctuated by the bed thumps

WHEN I SPEAK OF YOU

I got mad issues, brother
Like that old newspaper stacked in the corner
Of my broken heart
So even when I speak of you
It is old news
But
Since you are God
You got the power
To call the rain
And sometimes I forget my umbrella
At home
And find myself, crying in public
Hoping that mess
Don't make my heart weak

Yeah, I got mad issues
Because sometimes I find myself
Putting flowers in my hair
Like Billie Holiday
Humming:
*I'm a fool to want you
To want love that can't be true
A love that's there for others too*

Moaning for someone to love me
Like Memphis Minnie
Trying hard to sing:
*Me and my Chauffeur's Blues
Wont you be my chauffeur...
I want someone to drive me*

Down Town

Finding myself clicking songs
Tapping and twisting to the sound of
Miriam Makeba's

Strawberries!!!

Love tastes like strawberries,

And pray you see me on the cover
Of *Drum*, like Dolly Rathebe's
Husky furry voice adding sobs over "wakes"
And her love of Sophiatown

I got crazy mad issues
Like an old woman waiting over her kitchen table
For her husband to return
From wielding the wealthy man's drill
So I can rest from thoughts of you
Buy my self a cheap bag of *Swazi-weed*
Smoke a cloud vision of you
Until my bag is empty

I am tired of hearing echoes
(((let it go ... let it go ... let it go)))
Damnit! You still get to me
Even when I try to soak my self in a hot bath
To wash off the scent you left, six years ago
With your God like powers over me
Still have the potential to turn my blood cold
And sometimes I find myself
Wanting to slip on a bar of soap
Somehow maneuver my body into a position
To make my wrist find the razor
My neck the edge of the tub
Simultaneously
Making it all a mistake that you made
When you left me

Because that *shit* I was thinking is wrong
But I begin to cry even more
Like hail over a corrugated roof

Knowing that if
The soap, razor and edge of the tub
Were all aligned right
I might have died
Because my issues are more
Of me missing myself
Than you

SINKING

Some love is like this
Your heart feels over-crowded
And like on a lifeboat
You throw your pride out
Your self-respect out
Your independence out
Just to keep the head afloat

After a while you keep out
People
Friends
Everyone you know
Still it's not enough
The lifeboat is still sinking
And somehow you know
It's going to take you down

UNSIGNED-POST

Your glass house rebukes you
The bedroom
Has become the road
Inviting you to wander deep
Your dreams like a lamppost
Mock you
Still something seeps into your heart
Your floor creaks
Under your weight
You turn on the bed
Sleepwalk yourself
Out of a nightmare
Tread the house
The floor doesn't yield
Walls broken by silence
Not solid
You feel like a stranger in your own estate

NO POWERLESS BEING

While shacks eternally prowl the waters
In their possible dreams
While whales become extinct
While antelopes, ants, fleas, crickets
Master the art of flying
Butterflies and iguanas thrive
Without perching
Elephants growl in their willing solitude

Everything becomes all
The universe in us
The sea in the fish
Flight of air in the birds
Dreams of lions
Rivers of mountains
Oaths in history
Silent stones in the ocean beds

*“Just don’t insult the crocodile
until you’ve crossed the river”*

YEARS IN WORDS

I found myself

Hidden in several boxes, unlabeled

I found myself in 21 years of a broken mirror, unswept

Saw myself a wrinkled sheet like a frown,

Left unfixed

My hair greasy and twisted

Scattered on the bathroom floor

Stuck in the drains

I have become dust that floats

When curtains open

Empty like the ice-cube tray inside the fridge

Finished by months of drowning sorrows

Inside Chardonnay

I am a fiction character

Lost in paragraphs of a writer's memories

A short pause in a poet's lines

Waiting between a playwright's words

To be molded into master art

THE SEA WAS GOD

Our grand-mamas and grand-papas
Are old as time
Wrestling mysteries
Transforming myths into open books
Setting our hearts alight
Speaking in voices of lions- *Tau Moholo*
Thunder... *Tladi Mothwana*
Lightning... *Lehadima*
Monsters... *Dimo*

A voice bursting in flames will begin:

Ba re e ne e re

Qhoiiii!!!

Once... the sea was a God

The fire a new deity
That brought the universe
And the underworld spat out
You, you, you
And from the heart of darkness
We returned
And knew
The ocean was older than humanity
Older than fire
Older than rage
This mouth of a river
Dreaming to be a sea
The burning mirror

These old living memories
Told us the earth itself is
All things and nothing

These weavers of wisdom and follies

Raised storms before our eyes
Made great snakes appear
Vomited out fish near untraded shores
Ignited our minds
Imitated growls

Under the spell of night rituals
Tales of inhuman nights sparked the air
With their terrifying voices
Until darkness paused the sun
And then we could sleep well
For dawn to bring a new journey

These keepers of legends and lore
Readers of *majwe le masapo*
Go down into the seeds of time
Face uncharted fears
Know mutations of trees, plants and herbs
Causes of wars
Curses of witches
Lineage of *badimo*

They speak in riddles
Hide beneath idioms
Keep the oldest truest dreams of those alive
Our grand-papas and grand-mamas
Were real frontier people
Great explorers of the abyss
They brought the world within our souls
Made living within
And living without to be one

After creating beauty
Serving truth
These old fictional bards

Brave magicians
Living books would be silent
Allow the imagination
To give sanctuary

One day they disappear like lightning
A thousand years stand still
With living libraries burning
With all of us between the shelves

Ke tshomo ka mathetho!