

Part A: Thesis

Praying Mantis

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Part 1: INSIDE-OUT

PROLOGUE

I could only see in black and white as if I had travelled through time. I was the star of the medieval people who waited on me. The city was Johannesburg where strange faces called me a traitor because I was an educated black person. I hid between the skyscrapers and ran into a mirror image of myself as a man.

“I write this book,” he said to his readers,

“To invoke a yearning in our youth to awaken from slumber. To set examples for them to desist from characters like Velesazi and Nongendi, and imitate Nomsa and Themba. And also, to contribute to Xhosa literature.”

He signed off by calling himself our servant. These are the words from the note my great-grandfather left me.

We walked together across a barren field and past a graveyard. I was feeling tired and lost; I wanted to get home as fast as possible. We quickened our step and entered a church site. Inside the church were all my close relatives. I saw myself on stage looking down at them, and when I opened my mouth to sing, they began laughing at me.

I imagined him in his 1917 suit, as a writer, penning down his first novel that is dedicated to his mother. His round cheeks enveloped in a haze of candle light. He visited my dream in 2012 and in the dream he asked me,

“Do you see?”

I said, “Yes, I see.”

My great-grandfather hummed a song from his belly. I inhaled deeply into my belly and then exhaled a sound. Together we hummed this song that made everyone fall silent and listen. In the dream I could feel my lungs expanding and deflating along to the rhythm of the song. As my great-grandfather and I sang it, the night lamps shone brighter.

I had become my great-grandfather, wearing his suit and black leather shoes. His friends were my friends. They turned and asked me what my clan name was. When I told them, they whispered something among themselves. One of them said to me,

“Unogcwabevu.”

I saw a white unknown woman who was afraid of me. I told her it is going to be okay, and that I would not harm her. But the colour of my skin frightened her.

Chapter One: NOWANTED

Great-grandmother was a witch. She blamed not using birth-control on her lovers. She tricked and cheated her way out of anything. And she was capable of killing her enemies. We say great-grandmother felt angry one day. Her lovers made her so angry that she cast a spell on her off-spring, so all of her daughters did not marry.

They could have babies, but they could not get married. Just like she couldn't.

Her son married Nowanted. Nowanted was raised by her primary school teacher. She took baths in the river, and walked barefoot to school. Her school teacher beat her for being late even though she knew that Nowanted was serving breakfast to her biological sons. From this kind of treatment and harrowing poverty, she learned that children were raised through beatings.

Upon meeting her future father-in-law, he named her Nowanted. He said he knew that the family wanted her, hence Nowanted the wanted daughter. Nowanted was academically superior to her husband and they had quarrels about who's more educated than whom between them. She kept a library in her home and hosted jazz artists to practice their melodies. Her house was full of children. And all of them say she had tough love.

She lost her sons to alcoholism and paranoia. Her youngest son was the first to disappear. He was involved with *onoongubo* who rebelled against the apartheid government. Her other son was murdered by his alcoholic girlfriend who was caught having an affair. The eldest son gave up on his acting career and became a nurse with a drinking problem. Nowanted took me and my two older sisters under her care and I knew her as my mother.

When I was in grade one, the old lady taught me how to write the alphabet. She did this by placing lunch on the kitchen table and telling me that I won't get to eat my favourite food until I figured out what the letter D looks like. She would say, "I have shown you hundreds of times now, do not tell me that you have forgotten." I was frightened of my grandmother, but also in love with her. She set aside time to play with me and she even read to me before bedtime.

When she passed, some family members witnessed to having dreams about her and noticing catastrophes that would happen after the dreams. She left behind a segregated family and dark myths about the past. In later years I saw a new meaning in her name. I identified with it and projected my feelings of being an outlaw on to it. I thought I was being followed and watched and wanted. I shot a video of myself in monochrome portraying a femme fatale. I titled the video *Nowanted* in honour of my grandmother. I believed that through performing *Nowanted* I was embodying her strength.

Chapter Two: THE NEEDLES

A social worker drove us to the hospital. In the car she kept asking for my name, and where I went to university. I kept quiet, looking out the window. I was wondering if my mother and sister were not going home with me that night. Where were they sending me? The social worker parked her car in front of a few ambulances. We had arrived at a hospital. We went inside and sat on the cold metal seats. The social worker spoke with the nurses by the receptionist's office. And then came back to speak to my mother and sister.

She told them she had to leave, then gave my mother her business card. She told them they can report everything that had happened to the nurses, and if anything comes up, they can call her. She left us there, and then I started speaking again. I was telling my sister that she is an evil bitch and no wonder she was getting divorced. I stood up and followed them towards the beds that the nurses wanted me to rest on. I was shouting at everyone at this point.

"Who is possessed in here? Is it me, mom? What about the doctors and the nurses? Are they possessed?"

No one was talking to me.

"What about the patients? Are they possessed too? You are so ignorant, if this is how you treat educated people. Instead of giving us jobs you say we are possessed."

My mother and sister waited outside the ward, when a female doctor came in to speak to me. My ankles and wrists were strapped down with thick rubber belts. She asked me why I was upset, and what I thought was going on. I told her that my mother and sister think I am possessed. I told her I hate them for treating me like an abomination.

She said she could take me away from my mother and sister for a while, and then she asked me if I would like to go away. I asked her how long would I be going away for, when she said it might be for three days, just until I calm down and heal from any trauma that has triggered me. I told her I am fine, I just wanted to go home and sleep. She nodded then walked away, followed by my swear words directed at my mother and sister. She said a few things to them then disappeared.

I started praying and singing church hymns, showing my mother and sister that despite what they believed about me, I did not need to be exorcised. A nurse came in and walked to the side of my bed, two large men accompanying her. A large needle was in her hand as she told me to relax. I asked her what the needle was for – she said I must not worry and should just try and relax. I could not relax because I was afraid of needles. She motioned for the two men to loosen the rubber belts and turn me over. I murmured prayers and begged for her to not put the needle inside of me.

When my chest was pinned down on the bed, she rubbed my exposed butt cheek with wet cotton. I cried a very loud cry when the needle stung me. The rush of blood went straight to my heart, and I sobbed uncontrollably. Flashes of my break-up with Katlego seared through me. It was like a scene from *Silent Hill*, blindfolded nurses with blood stained needles forcing the ego to face up to the dark corners of memories that were once abandoned. I wanted to be dead.

When I fell into a pathetic stupor, the two men let me go. The nurse, smiling down at me said that I will feel better in the morning. She left the room with the two men following her. I lied there with hot tears streaming down my cheeks. Despair got the hold of me; I was at the mercy of my mother

and sister. Hunger crept in, and I asked my mother if she had brought anything to eat. She came closer to me and opened up her purse. She brought out some bananas and a sandwich. I felt thirsty too, really parched. I downed the water from the bottle that came from her purse.

My sister had left. I suspected she had driven back home, leaving me and my mother at the hospital. My mother told me that we were waiting for an ambulance to take us to the psychiatric hospital, where I will be admitted. Just as she was saying this to me, two ambulance drivers came in and put me on a wheelchair. They wheeled me to the ambulance, as my mother followed. We drove to the mental institution, where we had to wait for the doctor to arrive. It was past midnight, and the ward was ice cold.

A couple of hours later, the doctor was in to see me. I went in her office with my mother, and sat down in front of her as she opened my file. She told me she was going to draw a few blood samples from the veins on my arm, and that if I relax it would all be over soon. She stuck the needle in my arm, and by this time I was too drowsy to protest against the needle.

Epilim CR 300. Two pills in the morning, two pills at night. Hard to swallow, but good to block out unwanted feelings: anger, sadness, sexual arousal.

Chapter Three: MAKAZI

In the asylum, I had a lot of time to think. And I remembered that my cousin's house was big. She had done very well for herself. I remember that one day my big sister drove me to her place because she had a boyfriend coming over. When my sister left, she said I mustn't get upset because my cousin and her family were the ones who gave us clothes when we were hungry. My sister said this in front of my cousin and her mother, my mother's sister. It was not true. Whenever we visited my aunt's house my mother bought groceries and clothes for us. My sister had made it a habit of hers to lie in order to make my aunt and her daughters feel good about themselves.

My cousin's house was in Pretoria, and the sun was hotter in that area than anywhere in Gauteng that year. The nights were warm too, so I sat on the sofa next to makazi, my aunt, to share some cold drink with her. My cousin sat with her husband across from us and their baby boy was fast asleep in his room. We watched *America's Top Model* and I exclaimed to makazi that I wanted to be a modeller. My cousin quickly said,

"It's not modeller, it's model. You want to be a model."

My face felt hot with embarrassment. She sounded irritated. She went on to say,

"And besides, you're too skinny to be a model. You have a body of a twelve year old; no one can tell that you're actually twenty-one."

I sank in my seat thinking, *she is right*.

"That's not true, my baby," said makazi.

"If you want to be a model, go for it. I had your body when I was growing up, but that never stopped me from modelling," she said.

An insert on *Oprah* came on and makazi commented,

"Gosh, how I love this woman. I'd like to dress like her soon. I think her suits would look good on me. What do you think?"

She looked at me and I told her that I totally agreed. Oprah's look was made for her.

"I should also go for plastic surgery. I dread the idea of aging," she said.

Her face showed that she truly meant what she said. I couldn't believe that a woman as beautiful as my aunt could feel the way that she did. I thought my aunt was confident in herself. She owned a beauty salon after all. But maybe the beauty industry got to her head. I looked over at my cousin and she and her husband were fondling each other. It was through her marriage that we believed that the family curse could be broken.

Finally, they left us and went to their room and my aunt made me promise to keep what she was about to tell me our secret.

"Before I met my daughters' father, I was admired by boys," she said with a smirk.

"I had boyfriends in every province and if I was stranded, I'd just call one of them to come pick me up and he would let me spend the night with him."

“Wow, that must’ve been exciting,” I said.

“Yes, I had fun. And,” she said, “when you are a popular girl, you must not share your body with all the men that approach you. Do you understand?”

“Ewe, makazi,” I said.

“Men must look at you but not touch, they must always wonder. That’s how you get what you want,” she said.

“Ewe, makazi,” I said.

Chapter Four: VISITATION

The asylum was a perfect abyss, where all the demonic souls were damned to live. At four AM we had to wake up and make our beds. Our beds were lined-up in a single hall. We could hear and see each other. We spent the darkness of the night together. We also shared the shower. We would cluster in one bathroom, naked, while we watched the other one finish showering.

At seven AM we gathered around the dining table for prayer time. We sang church hymns and any disobedience was not tolerated. We all had to read out the calendar and know our minister of health and head nurses' names by heart. We sat down to eat and during this time we could talk to one another. We mostly talked about when we were getting out of there.

I made friends with Wildcat, Catnap, Kitty Cat, and I was named Smarty Cat. Wildcat was *igqirhakazi*, the one who gave us morning sermons. She was the leader of the *Cool Cats* crew. We thought of the names from that television kiddies show.

I was Smarty Cat because I always had my pen and diary with me, and I was calmer than the rest (almost pensive). The older women knew me as Chief. I was no leader, but I wasn't following anyone else either. Wildcat taught me how to smoke snuff in the toilet. After every meal, she and I would steal away from the watchful eyes of the nurses and get high on snuff. They allowed us to smoke, but only during the times suitable for them.

We were allowed visitation, but only if we behaved ourselves. Our families who had sent us there would come to visit us, and we had to pretend to be well with them. Catnap was only fifteen years old, but her problem was that she couldn't stop laughing. Catnap laughed the whole day; she would fall down in a seizure of giggles.

One night I turned to look at her, because her bed was next to mine, and I told her, "If you don't shut up, I will fuckin' kill you". She stopped laughing. Her parents came to visit her the next day, and she was very happy to see them. She was too young to let anything get to her so, unlike us, she held no resentment towards her family.

The most important visit of the day was the doctor's visit. The doctor had our files in an office designated to her. She would see about five of us each day, depending on which five were selected for the day. The doctor decided if you were getting free or sent to *eBhofolo*. If you were sent to *eBhofolo* no one would ever see you again. But it was a good sign to be seen by the doctor, as it meant that you would be let off free eventually, meaning you would be sent back home to your family.

I didn't meet the doctor alone. In her office the head nurse and two extra nurses were always present. They were there to vouch for my good or bad behaviour in the asylum.

"So, why are you here, Thobeka? What happened," the doctor asked me in my first session. I was surprised that she didn't know.

"I didn't want to go to church," I replied.

"Do you think your family was wrong to send you here?" she asked. I had to say the right thing, so I could get out.

"I think they sent me here because they care," I said. I looked around the room, and the spectators approved.

"How is the medication treating you?" she asked.

"It is treating me well," I said.

I was hoping that we would get to the part of my leaving, but I was warned never to bring it up first. I had to be composed, not show desperation. Act natural, and more than natural: act healthy.

I thought of my first time ever talking to a psychologist. I was nine years old. It was after my big sister had tried to commit suicide. Her psychologist wanted to see all of us as a unit to figure out what might have been the cause. My first encounter with a psychologist taught me what to expect from psychologists. Not much.

Chapter Five: ESCAPE

I've heard that humility, when imposed, results in rebellion. It must come from the inside to resonate with the world.

There was a new girl in the asylum. Tall and slender. She said she was called Dilima. She had a pretty, petite face, and she was a teenage mother. They dragged her in screaming for her baby and cussing her mother. They kept her in solitary for her to cool down. She didn't cool down for many days.

Her mother had called the police on her soon after she had gone through labour. Her mother told the police to take her away because she was unfit to be a mother. Her mother believed that to have a child at that age was a pure sign of insanity. And so the child was better off with its mother kept in an asylum, and raised by its grandmother.

Dilima's tears were as sombre as her menstrual blood. One time they had to carry her back to solitary without her underwear on so she was bleeding onto the floor. She couldn't stop crying about her baby. A few weeks later she calmed down. She wanted to smoke snuff with Wildcat and I. Wildcat was good with her. Wildcat had a daughter of her own.

Dilima was chatty and intelligent. She told us she was a star student at her school until she became pregnant. She stood up and walked on the artificial grass. She said she had important events to attend: the town was having a festival. She looked up at the high wall, and then ran towards it. Before we knew it she was climbing it.

The nurses found her on top of a roof. They tried to poke her with metal sticks. She had no plan on which direction to take, so she decided to tell the nurses to let her go. We watched to see if they would catch her. And she put up a good fight, but eventually they caught her and sent her back to solitary.

Chapter Six: UKHO

Dilima reminded me of Ukho. My niece, Ukho, was born in the month of the Pleiades. Her mother was my eldest sister, and her father was her high school sweetheart. Ukho was the most beautiful baby I had ever met and everyone in our neighbourhood saw it. At age three she loved watching *Barbie* movies. Then she would take a towel and wrap it around her head telling us that she has Barbie's hair. I loved watching her mouth when it opened to gulp down a spoon of yoghurt. I liked how her baby teeth stuck out of her gums.

She loved playing pranks and generally being in our company. When her little brother was born, she was always eager to watch over him and feed him and change his nappies. If her brother was speaking gibberish, we waited for her to tell us what he meant.

It was soon after the birth of her brother that her family went through bankruptcy. When they lost their house by the beach, Ukho asked if there were windows where they were moving to next. When they lost the TV, Ukho wanted to know how people can live without the dish. They quickly moved into a shack in the neighbourhood where my sister and I grew up. They became skinnier, as their mother struggled cooking with a primus stove.

Ukho went from school to school, attempting to make friends wherever she went. I remember her childhood friend, Rosy, whom I thought was responsible for Ukho learning swear words and backchatting. Her favourite songs were *No One* by Alicia Keys; her mom listened to Mariah Carey. She grew to love mathematics and science and won awards.

Her parents were always at odds with her school principal and teachers. They felt that some rules, like making it compulsory for children to take contraceptives at the age of twelve, were irresponsible. Letters were exchanged between the school and her parents, and the school sounded condescending.

Till today, I live with the worries I had for Ukho watching TV shows that promote whiteness as superior and beautiful and that she won't have a clearer understanding of who she is and how worthy she is. I grew concerned about her mother taking her to hair salons to straighten out her hair. Pressurising her to look after her little brother and blaming everything that her brother did wrong on her and not providing her with enough space or privacy. Her father saying things like, "Women cannot be heirs to their father's valuables, and men are the head of the family."

But I saw the strength of Nowanted in Ukho. And I admired that, and her generous heart.

Chapter Seven: WILDCAT

They like a sick person. Whoever they are. They like washing a sick person. And washing a sick person's clothes. They like the hospital, and waking up in hospital chairs. Waking up to hospital food and hospital flies. They like the shouting nurses and tired doctors. The politics and politically sick people.

I first saw her sitting at the dining table. Wildcat. She was applying Cutex to her fingernails, in different colours. Some of it were on her eyebrows, different shades of pink and green. She was a big girl. Big belly and thighs. And she ate a lot. More than any of us. It's funny because one morning, two girls came to sit next to her, then almost bowing to her, asked humbly for some Cutex. One of them owed her something, a cigarette I think it was, so Wildcat wasn't on good terms with her. But the girl begged and begged and begged her.

Wildcat had a big, beautiful smile. An enthusiastic smile. With big white teeth, I thought her teeth were perfect. I imagined that she could afford going to the dentist with her money. But when Wildcat was mean, she could get really mean. Wildcat wasn't afraid of fighting. She could take a punch. And she made sure that she never lost a fight. I saw her beat down a couple of girls, and most girls in our ward were afraid of her.

She liked watching me in the courtyard, while I chanted *Hare Krishna*, then she would walk over to me and ask me for yoga lessons. It had been in exchange for yoga lessons that she promised to smoke snuff with me for the first time. It was a fair deal, because I liked the way snuff made me feel. Especially, when I chanted my *Hare Krishna*. When I chanted, I could feel my crown chakra vibrating like jelly. I would put my head on the pillow and closed my eyes. Then I'd think that I was connecting with a distant memory.

I am chanting now, legs crossed on the asylum's narrow bed. But I can see Wildcat walking over to me from across the ward.

"What do you want?" I ask her.

"I want you to come with me," she replies, smiling, "Come sit with me in the TV room."

"The TV room? I want to sleep."

"Sleeping all day is not good for you," she says, "Besides we're not allowed on our beds until sleep time. Come."

So we go to the TV room and sit on the empty sofas. She slouches back and closes her eyes.

"Isn't this nice?" she asks me.

I say, "Yes."

I also close my eyes and lean my neck on the back of the sofa. She doesn't like people talking when she is trying to sleep. She is the only one who has the privilege of getting snuff, "Because," she said, "I am *igqirha*."

We are best friends, except for the times that she wants to hang around with me *all* the time, or those days when she wants me to read what she'd written. She had picked up writing because of seeing me writing in my journal. Judging from what she was writing, it seemed like she was spiritual.

Chapter Eight: THE POLITICALLY SICK PERSON

We had a “Mrs. Ramaphosa” in our ward. Of course, that wasn’t her real name, but she wore a black ring on her left finger and said she was married to our president. She was rumoured to be a part of a secret society. One night, after pill time, I said to her that Wildcat was becoming too attached to me. She advised that I remain vigilant: Wildcat might want something from me.

I believed Mrs. Ramaphosa because she was older, and might have been part of a secret society. She seemed to know everything about everybody in the ward, and was the only one who could talk to Karen, the brunette woman who spent her days walking up and down the hallway, trying to touch everyone, and pray for them.

She also knew how to talk to the beautiful Becky, a middle-aged blonde anorexic woman who was a pathological smoker. Everyone avoided Karen and her prayers, and no one would start a fight with the irritable Becky. Not even the juvenile delinquents in the hall messed around with Becky, but they could always take *my* slippers or *my* toothbrush.

As far as secret societies went, Mrs. Ramaphosa knew that Karen was raped by her father. She told me they will never let her leave this place if she doesn’t have a family to go to. Karen was not an angry person, until this one time that the nurses were treating us like shit that she screamed injustice and sinful behaviour at them. Karen had a fire in her veins that time; the meekest person out of all of us was the one to stand up for us.

I sat in front of Karen a day after that incident, and listened to what it was she was mumbling to herself. At the beginning it was a prayer, and then she looked at me and said, “That son of a bitch raped me because they told him to.”

“Who are they, Karen?”

“My father was a member of a satanic club; they said he must rape me. It was a ceremony. Who does that to his own daughter?”

Chapter Nine: NERVOUS BREAKDOWN

I was in the asylum because of my family too. They said I had a nervous breakdown. But I remembered it differently. It was a hot spring day, and the TV was on. My mother had gone ahead without me to church. And my big sister was at work. Or so I thought. I heard the car engine pulling over. The doors slammed shut, and footsteps rushed inside the house. My big sister was towering over me with two of her employees. I wasn't wearing any underwear.

I had pepper-spray in my bag. So I used that to my defence. The spray spread across the room, I had to open the windows. The two employees took hold of my arms and legs, and that's when I grabbed them by their weaves. I ripped the hair strands from their scalps and said, "You are nothing. You're worth nothing."

I hated these kinds of confrontations. They always gave me a sense of guilt. But my sister never showed any remorse for forcing herself on me. Her ego was toxic; it repressed a lot of negative desires and made her believe she was an honest person. She was very manipulative. She used her tears a lot so that people would think that she is the victim.

They took me to the car and drove off with me. To church, where a prophet was waiting to exorcise me. I told them in the car, "You are fat uneducated sluts." My sister was crying in the backseat. *What is it that is making her sad, I wondered, She is getting what she hoped for. To reprimand her little sister for being an abomination.*

I had had enough of her tears. She betrayed our family to complete strangers. She could have let me go. Left me in peace. But she chose to degrade my person. Now this madness is all that these strangers knew about me.

I promised to sue her. I promised her in front of the whole congregation. There was a mic to my mouth and a camera on my face when I promised I would sue her and send her prophet back to his foreign land.

"Go back to where the fuck you came from, you fucking foreigner," I said to the prophet, feeling emotional relief.

He looked at me as if he had the upper hand. He then did some kind of a Jedi-mind-trick on me and said,

"What do you want with her?"

Implying that I was possessed and he was now addressing the demon that had possessed me.

"Fuck you, you fucking foreigner," I responded.

I despise prophetic churches. If you'll notice, there have been a large number of these people coming here, and pretending to be prophets. They are pretending because how come a lot of them have seen angels, gone to heaven, and preach the Word of God only in the parts that demand monetary sacrifice?

I told him to go home and tell his fellow prophets that we have had enough of them.

"This prophet is a fraud," I said.

"Who sent you?" he asked.

"I am the messenger of God, are you?" I asked.

He called over his ushers to hold me down. He smacked me in the forehead with his open palm. I felt the pain crack my skull, but there were no demons to be found.

"Gender based violence!" I screamed.

My mother, standing in the front row, had sadness in her eyes. My sister was crying. I asked my mother if she was going to let them humiliate me like this, to which she did not answer. I felt deep resentment for her then told her she is just as rotten as my sister is.

The prophet kept hitting me, but I wouldn't fall down. If I fell down, the prophet would think that I am indeed possessed and ripe for exorcism. This church had a large number of women who suffered from being bewitched or being witches themselves. They complained about fucking demons in their sleep, saying that a witch had sent those demons to fuck them.

I know of many naïve idiots who have been raped by spiritual husbands, so many that churches now preach the gospel about these things. At church there would be a crazy woman who walks up the stairs to the podium to tell the congregation about her dream last night. Where do spirits go when they have raped?

They go to hell. The prophet places his hands on the woman then begins shouting at the spirits to come out. The crazy woman meows like a cat and growls like a dog. I think to myself, *what an idiot*. She will do this until the entire service is about her.

The demons would speak through her and say they are not going to hell. Then the prophet would say, "Do they know me? They do not know me." The congregation would proudly go wild over his affirmations. And, like any other charismatic figure, his affirmations must not be weaker than the devil.

Later on the day, the crazy woman would end up testifying to a miracle. Maybe she had a lover who put a potion in her food. Maybe it was a piece of pie that she ate while on a date with him. Maybe he was afraid of her and planned for her to never leave him. He only wanted her to love him. But the potion only worked to attract bad spirits for her: an ape, tikoloshes, and spiritual husbands. She would blame all of them on her boyfriend. Men. And their witchcraft.

Chapter Ten: CUTTING

I drowsily walked back from the toilet thinking it was odd how bits of glass lay on the tiled floor. I had just gotten my medication and was headed for bed. I tucked myself in and easily drifted off to sleep. Thirty or so minutes passed then a loud gasp came from someone. I sat up as the nurses and security guards ran in. One of the patients was sitting up in bed with her white sheets over her body. She was obviously doing something that she did not want us to see.

The nurses uncovered her and saw blood coming out of her cut wrists and a piece of glass in her hand just as Wildcat started yelling, "She cut herself." They quickly grabbed her hand to stop her from doing any more damage and a struggle ensued because she wouldn't give up the glass. She started speaking incoherent sentences saying that she wasn't cheating on this girl with her boyfriend, and that *the girl* was the slut. The nurses were so amused they even started laughing. They asked her who she was speaking to but she didn't seem to hear them. They made a joke out of the fact that the patient was upset over a boy. They thought this reflected on the attitude of many teenage girls.

"Leave him alone, honey," one said.

"If he doesn't love you he's not the one."

"Andimfuni mos mna," the patient retaliated.

They tied her down but the knots were too weak for her so she stood up and walked up and down the passage way. When the nurses caught on they rushed back inside with a needle this time. They called male nurses from the men's ward to come help. And two large male nurses came inside to hold her down. This patient was very erratic she often attacked other patients and nurses too.

She proved to be a danger to herself by almost ending her own life with a piece of glass. Wildcat said that she thought the patient was the one who broke the light bulb in the toilet.

"She must have kept it with her until we had all gone to sleep," she said.

They wheeled her away in a wheelchair, as I tried telling her that it was going to be okay. One of the nurses asked me how that is any of my business.

"You're as sick as she is," said the nurse, "so go back to your bed, now."

Chapter Eleven: DR. MANDISA ON THE PHONE

A nurse told me that I had someone waiting for me on the phone. The only time we were let in the nurse's station is when we had a call. They unlocked the door and I uncomfortably squeezed myself through that small office and found the phone receiver face down on the nurse's desk. The nurse left me by myself so I could speak with the person on the other end in private.

It was my cousin, Dr. Mandisa, who my mother had helped get funding to go study medicine in Cuba. Dr. Mandisa returned to South Africa during the World Cup, and worked as a doctor in the military. She had her own private practice now, got married, and had a son.

"How are you?" she asked.

"Ndiyaphila sisi, unjani wena?" I said.

"Ndiyaphila nam, iNkos' indigcinile," she replied.

"Mamela bhabha, your mother told what happened between you and the university, I heard you didn't leave on good terms," she said.

"Yes, that's true," I confirmed.

"Would you mind if I intervene as a doctor? I promised your mother that I would help you settle things with them," she said.

"No, I don't mind sisi, thanks," I said.

"Okay, mamela nhe, I told the registrar that you are under medical care now and that you will no longer be any trouble," she said.

"Yes, I won't. Will they let me re-register?" I asked her.

"I'm not sure as of yet, but we are working on it," she said.

There was a pause, she removed phlegm from her throat then continued,

"I wanted to ask you something, please don't take it the wrong way. It's only procedure, okay," she said.

"Okay," I said.

"Have you gone for an HIV test?" she said.

"I always go for an HIV test," I said.

"Okay, yes, so what were the results?" she asked.

"Uh- negative," I said.

"Okay. I'm asking because I have dealt with cases like this before where a person was reported to show violent behaviour and paranoia," she continued,

"There has been research that shows an HIV strain that affects mental processes of its victims. I have consulted with a lot of patients and even family members and I can tell you now that there are even

reports that one of our family members thought that there were people after his money,” she cleared her throat again saying,

“He fell into deep depression after losing his job and eventually we detected HIV in his brain.”

“I don’t have HIV in my brain,” I said.

“Well, if you had tested HIV positive you could tell me,” she said.

“I know, thank you,” I said.

“Also, if you’re planning on going back to university you must learn to do things differently okay,” she said.

“I hear you, sisi,” I said.

“Yes, I understand that you get upset and start saying mean things to people that you should not say. Don’t do that anymore,” she said.

“Okay,” I said.

“There are Cannabis products for students who are into weed, so we can put you on them if you want,” she said.

“Thank you, sisi,” I said.

“Okay, uhlale kakuhle ke nhe,” she said.

“I will,” I said.

She hung up.

Chapter Twelve: LAUREEN

It was dark so I couldn't see, but a figure was walking past the end of my bed. The figure suddenly hit the edge of the bed next to me so hard it made a sound. Lights were turned on and then Laureen said,

"You witch."

This witch was the 60-and-some-odd-year-old looking woman with beads tied to her wrists and ankles.

"Get her away from here. This witch was trying to cast her spells on us," yelled Laureen.

"No weapon formed against me shall prosper," she continued yelling.

The nurses came in and carried mamBhele back to her bed which was next to Laureen's. She seemed to have been sleepwalking but Laureen was hell bent on that she saw her casting spells on us.

"I saw her," she said,

"I saw her kneeling on her bed and mumbling her spells. Then I saw her stepping off the bed and walking in that direction," Laureen pointed to the corner of the bed where mamBhele finally hit her head.

When she came too, mamBhele began defending herself saying she is not a witch and she does not know how she ended up outside of her sheets.

"I saw you. You were doing witchcraft," said Laureen.

"Shut up, you coloured," mamBhele yelled back and said,

"*You* are the witch, not me."

"No weapon formed against me shall prosper," said Laureen, clapping her hands.

Laureen was obsessed with that Bible verse. She told us that she had even said it when her family was calling the police on her. Her mother had said something to upset her the evening that she was admitted, and the police got there right before she could take out her anger on her mother, her brother, and her sister-in-law. She was going to stab them all with a beer bottle. *No weapon formed against me shall prosper*, she thought.

Chapter Thirteen: GOD WOULDN'T DO THIS TO ME

The fifteen cuts on her chocolate brown face were trails of how much her cousins hated her. She was found bleeding on the side of the road by police officers. They took her to hospital and then after that she was deemed mentally unfit. The nurses would tell her to take her medication and she would refuse. She often fought with them when they pulled out pills from under her tongue. We all had to make the clicking-sound in case we were not swallowing. Asanda failed every time.

I was standing in the queue outside the nurse's station waiting for my name to be called when Asanda, holding the cup of tablets in her hand, said,

"What is this?"

"Drink," said one of the nurses, handing her a cup of water.

"These are not my pills," said Asanda,

"What are these for?"

"They are ARV's," said the nurse, placing the cup of water on her desk with a sigh.

"ARV's," said Asanda, shocked,

"Why are you giving me these?"

"Your blood results returned positive," said the nurse.

Asanda twisted on her heels and lunged out of the nurse's station. They let her go this time, vowing:

"We will deal with you later."

"You are not going to do anything, you Satanists," she yelled at them,

"I am not taking those pills."

"You have to take them," said one of the nurses.

"I don't have to do shit," said Asanda,

"I believe in God, God will heal me."

We all had our dose and then prepared to go to sleep. Wildcat was wiping her breasts and armpits with the baby wipes that her mother had brought her. She said she was feeling hot. She got the baby wipes idea from seeing me use them. From a distance I could hear Asanda cussing at the head nurse who was called in to force ARV's down her throat.

"You are Satanists," yelled Asanda,

"God wouldn't do this to me."

Chapter Fourteen: THE CATATONICS

One night, the wheels of a wheelchair brought in a dark-skinned woman who was probably in her mid-thirties. Her family was right behind her looking solemn. Something terrible must have happened but they seemed to love her dearly. She was catatonic and vomit was oozing out of her mouth. The nurses tucked her in bed and then left her there. She took Mrs. Ramaphosa's bed and Mrs. Ramaphosa was moved to the next ward.

All I would need to do to see Mrs. Ramaphosa again was to just walk passed the wall separating our beds. And there Mrs. Ramaphosa would be lying down exhausted from old age. The family of the catatonic was allowed to come inside my ward and say their last goodbyes to their beloved mother or sister. The catatonic coldly told them,

"I am God's prophet, I see things."

She kept repeating this statement until she fell asleep. When it was time for supper, the nurses realised that they couldn't feed her, so they gave her Becky's milk that her husband bought earlier. Becky's husband was never going to find out. On the left side of the catatonic's bed, slept Thabisa who had a problem with giving up alcohol. On the right was a 60-and-some-odd-year-old woman who kept wailing about her daughter abandoning her. This old woman's bed was to the left of Wildcat's bed and she and Wildcat were enemies.

"Shut up you old hag," said Wildcat.

"You shut up you fat bitch," retorted the old woman.

Wildcat always teased the old woman, telling her that she was upset because she craved her snuff. This statement would rub the old woman the wrong way, and then she would spew out insults at Wildcat for hours on end. Although life was tough for us in the asylum, like the nurses and the fungi growing on the tiles in the shower, we were happy to have each other. To see familiar faces every day made us feel less alone. But this too was soon to change when more catatonics were brought in.

Soon, those who had families would be sent home to make more space for the new patients. And those who did not have families were going to be transferred to *eBhofolo*.

Chapter Fifteen: EBHOFOLO

It was slowly becoming quiet in the asylum as more and more patients drove off with their families or in an ambulance on a road to eBhofolo. Marianne received a phone call from her husband and broke down crying like the many times he has called her. And in each of those times, the nurses were there to tease her. She walked back into the ward and buried her face in a pillow. Moments later she was told that her father was there to see her.

Marianne started packing and we saw her father waiting by the nurse's station. He hugged her and told her that he loves her.

"How are the kids?" she said, as she pulled away to look at him,

"Do they know I am coming home?"

"Darling, you are not coming with me," said her father.

"What do you mean? It's why you are here isn't it?" she said.

"No honey," he said,

"I am here to say goodbye."

"You are going to Bhofolo, Marianne," said one of the nurses.

"But dad," said Marianne crying.

"I love you honey, this is for your own good," said her father crying,

"You are not well, honey."

Male nurses came in and pulled her away from her father's arms. They dragged her to the ambulance and the last thing we heard from her was her unforgettable crying.

Chapter Sixteen: THE PLAYROOM

The playroom stayed locked at the corner adjacent the toilets. We waited for the therapist to come open it for us so we could have something to do aside from smoking in the courtyard all day. Eventually, she came to see us and opened the door to the playroom. I thought it was a weird place that looked like a children's playroom instead of a place reserved for adult women. It made it clear to me that these people thought we were lesser than.

Inside it were crayons, plastic mirrors, and dolls with missing limbs. The therapist wanted us to find colours that we liked from the eye-shadow and lipsticks that were there. Wildcat jumped at the opportunity of putting on lipstick on her eyebrows. The therapist asked her why she was doing this, and Wildcat said,

"Don't worry, all the nurses here know this is how I like my make-up."

The therapist rolled her eyes and gave out a sigh. She sat slouched and looked at the time and then said,

"Okay, fifteen minutes before we head back for supper, hurry up and put the make-up where you found it."

The doctor ended up using that room to host group therapy with us. She brought in a white board and black Koki pens. She told us that she was going to help us understand what our conditions were. Her focus was on bipolar. She asked us what we thought we knew about bipolar. Wildcat raised her hand and said,

"It's when you lose your temper."

"Yes, bipolar is when you have manic episodes and depressed episodes," said the doctor,

"What would you like to learn from today about bipolar?"

Mrs. Ramaphosa said she wanted to know more about the medication we were taking.

"Well, for bipolar we prescribe Epilim and Haloperidol," said the doctor,

"Has any of you heard of Epilim?"

"Yes," said Wildcat.

"Yes," said a patient that was sitting next to me.

"Epilim is normally given to patients with epilepsy," said the doctor,

"But we have discovered that the part of the brain that is triggered by an epileptic episode is the same part of the brain that is triggered by a manic episode for bipolar patients."

"This explains why when I lose my temper, I feel like there is fire in my brain," said Wildcat.

"Yes, we give you Epilim to put out that fire in your brain," said the doctor,

"Alright, it seems like you understand your condition and medication pretty well."

"Ma'am, does Epilim take away sexual arousal as well," asked the patient sitting next to me,

"It's just that I've noticed while taking it when I was still with my husband. I lost my libido."

"Yes, Epilim does affect your libido," replied the doctor,

"But you must also keep in mind ladies that you can't just stop taking your medication because you think you're feeling better."

"Because that fire in the brain will come back," said Wildcat.

"Correct," said the doctor.

Chapter Seventeen: THE LIONESSE

A few of us were left moping around the asylum with a broken TV and occasional smoke breaks. One night, after my medication, the nurses brought in a feisty patient. She looked like she was in her early forties with a lion's body whose hips and thighs were carved to accentuate each muscle. She had a deep persuasive voice like she has held leadership positions. She calmly told the nurses that she knew it was her boss that brought her there.

"Why did your boss bring you here?" asked the head nurse.

"Because he hates me," said the patient,

"You think I don't know what he's doing?" said the patient.

"You are here because you are not well. You need to get better," said the head nurse.

"Who said I am not well?" said the patient.

"Enough of this nonsense, we are going to give you a shot," said the head nurse.

She must be really important to have the head nurse address her like that, I thought. I related to her story though. I too was up against a whole university that threatened to bar me from ever studying again. My entire family thought I deserved to be in here just like her family had been manipulated by her boss. She was my hero. I wished for her to be able to convince the nurses of the truth. I wanted her to know that she wasn't alone.

She was cool and collected that unlike us she never spoke about her life before she came to the asylum but like some of us each time they turned her over to take the needle in the thigh she fought off the nurses. They could not feed her pills. She fell asleep as soon as they injected her. Her three sisters brought her supper every night. They seemed to love her very much. They were as big as she was but not as fair. She shared her food with us without saying anything. If I was going to talk to her it was going to be the next day after lunch.

It was fairly easy finding her all alone with her thoughts on why she was there and how she was planning on walking out. I introduced myself and told her that in Hare Krishna I learned about a warrior who had to go to war against his family. I told her that this story teaches us to be brave despite the fact that we have to go against our families. She smiled and said thank you. I assured her that I would be available if she needed someone to talk to and walked away.

That evening while she was sitting with her sisters and a man from their church I overheard her speaking about me.

"You see that girl walking there," she said,

"She said I must kill my family. And I love my family; the devil wants me to kill you."

"That won't happen sister," said the man.

Chapter Eighteen: THANK YOU

I didn't want the Lioness to go against her family. Even though mine had gone against me. My father, for instance, has not been paying child support for years now and my mother and two of my older sisters were suffering. I remember that sometimes we would go nights without food while I knew that my father was eating supper with his new family. My school fees were not paid and I wore my old school uniform to my new school which was embarrassing because the new school was a higher primary and the old school a lower primary. I was moving up in grades, but it did not show physically. The other children started to make fun of me because of this which made my years as a primary scholar unbearable.

My best friend from primary school, Phumeza, had a dad who worked nine to five for his family, so she did not suffer. She could hang out with the cool kids and proudly open her lunch box in public. All I had for lunch was last night's supper that didn't usually look good. It would most commonly be badly made dumpling or water bread with fried cabbage. My lunchbox would smell of cabbage when I opened it. I learned to like the food just like I learned to be humble and not to bring too much attention to myself.

Eventually, Phumeza stopped being my friend because I was too poor to hang around with. I couldn't afford most of the things she wanted to buy like sweets. She stopped inviting me over for weekends because she wanted to spend more time with her new mates. And I was too skinny and too unattractive; I would scare away the cute boys in the group.

Then a new girl in our school became friends with me. Her name was Noluthando and she had thick long hair. She was very beautiful and kind. She said she noticed that I was alone and that she thought nobody should be alone. We went to parties together where she said I must come with her after school because she had something to show me. I waited for her after school and together we went to her house for the first time. I met her mother and other siblings who had heard so much about me. They seemed to genuinely like me.

We went towards her bedroom where her mother opened a plastic bag full of old clothes. Noluthando looked at me smiling and then said,

"I know you may take offense but we were getting rid of these clothes and I told my mom that someone might need them."

It was at that moment that it all made sense to me. Noluthando thought I was so poor that I couldn't afford to have clothes. She was right.

"Thank you so much," I said, picking up the plastic bag.

To my surprise the bag was very heavy. It seemed too heavy to be holding just clothes.

Noluthando and I carried the bag together until we reached my house. She was very excited to see how my mother would react to all these clothes. Luckily for her my mother was home. So, we showed her the clothes and my mother did not object. She acted over the moon. I guessed that she also could not let down strangers who were acting out of kindness.

I started wearing Noluthando's peach floral dress that day. It was my favourite. Everyone thought it suited me very well. It was Noluthando's favourite dress as well and she loved that I loved it too. We kept seeing each other and our friendship grew tighter. Tighter also because she was one of the first

people in my life to confront my poverty head on. To engage it and attempt to do something about it.

Chapter Nineteen: WASKOMS

Our showers are grim and cold to look at. The tiles are older than all of us combined in the asylum. Although I've never been inside a real prison, I can imagine that we shower like prisoners here.

I thought of home, sometimes, when I showered in the asylum. We have no bathtubs or showers at home. We have waskoms. We plug in the kettle then leave the kitchen. We head for the bathroom or whichever part of the house where we keep our waskoms, then take either a plastic or a metallic waskom. At home we only have the plastic ones. The larger one is red, but it leaks so no one can use it. The medium one is blue and the smallest is black.

When the water has come to a boil, we wait for the kettle to turn off automatically, and then we pour the boiling water onto the waskom. Kettles don't last long in *ekasi*. So sometimes, we have to use either of our pots to boil water.

We then mix the hot water with cold water. The mist climbs up our cheekbones. We take our waskoms to the bedroom or whichever part of the house where we take a bath, then place it on the floor. The bending of the body is a hefty task. For adults, it is a long way down with the water heavy in our arms.

Our minds wander around. Maybe they start thinking about our relationship with our boyfriends. How they have changed. They used to be the one calling, but now we are the ones to initiate calls. They seemed distant these days like they are interested in someone else.

They could be interested in someone else, have we checked their Facebook statuses lately? Maybe we start thinking about the criminals who could walk in at any moment. That frustrates us about the township, the fact that we could never feel safe. Not when we're naked, especially, not when we're absolutely alone in the house.

We take the soap and the washing rag and put them inside the waskom. The water is lukewarm on our hands. We massage the soap onto the washing rag then prepare to wash our face. It must always be the face first and not the body. The body is always the filthiest part of us humans.

We use glycerine soap. Other soaps can irritate our skin and destroy good bacteria that our skin needs to fight away infections. We could get fungal infection from using those. We either use glycerine soap or aqueous cream on our skin.

Even when we grew older, we felt comfortable walking around naked in the house. We'd even change our playlists while naked. Wash the first half of our bodies then after we're finished, go to the sitting room and turn up the volume.

We can't complain and say that we had a rough childhood because of not having a bathtub or shower. It was our normal. At a certain age, we were never lazy about taking baths, but looked forward to taking them, even twice daily.

Right when we are washing our vagina, we must be careful not to use soap. No matter what they have told us about the vagina, do not use soap. Water will do its natural job. We can pour a pinch of salt in it, to rinse the vagina. Sometimes, to save electricity we cannot rinse our vaginas with two waskom's worth of water. When we are done, our filth will be left all over the waskoms. Our soaps

would have turned the water to a greyish brown. We would have to wash that grime off and flush it down the toilet. We would switch off the music then sit on the couch to apply moisturiser onto our skins. We would put on some clothes then go make some food. It would just be us and our thoughts. We would think of what to watch on television or what to write for a poem. Poems used to appeal to us back then.

My inspiration was my boyfriend. I wrote only sad things about him. My loneliness was reflected. A part of me enjoyed being alone. If I was not alone I would never have kept this memory of waskoms, or the dirty faces of criminals.

I have wondered if some of the criminals have taken a bath. In my *kasi* no one had qualms with looking unkempt. Unkempt was the signature of my people. They did not like taking baths just like they did not like getting an education. Very few of them liked taking baths, and they were all girls.

It is a shame if a girl does not take a bath. It is a taboo. A girl must know at an early age how to use her waskom. She is the care-giver of the family. She must, at all times, be put together. That is why when girls become grandmothers they go through the most. They can't bath themselves. They wear the same clothes again and again and walk around smelling of urine.

Boys are not under any pressure to be clean or educated. When they have a job, they will try to be clean all the time. But, when they are *amaphara*, they could wear the same clothes every day and spend their days smoking.

I couldn't imagine what it would be like having sex with them. So, I stayed a virgin until I was twenty-one. My first boyfriend was *iphara*, but he cleaned up very well when he got a job. He used to say that his problem was that he couldn't afford soap all the time. I found this such a pity.

I liked my boyfriend better when he shaved his head. When he had his hair he looked like a hungry chicken. That is why I cheated on him. I cheated on him with a lover from Facebook. I could call him my cyber boyfriend, I guess.

When I first met him, it was at a boarding house. There was a shower there. I remember how his essential oils masked the air. His brown skin was soft like a baby's skin. He said he used baby oil. I liked touching him, kissing him, and feeling his skin on my tongue.

The second time I saw him; I took a trip to Johannesburg and went to his place. I showered using his Sunlight green soap. He said he liked it because it is good for the skin and he had been using it since childhood. I applied coconut oil on my skin, and then joined him in bed.

I wanted to know if he loved me. All he said was that we were not dating. He fell asleep and I ran the hot tub. I entered the tub and let the fumes massage my body. I enjoyed this sort of spa treatment. I wished I could stay in that tub forever. But I thought of him, lying there, in the next room.

I started singing to myself like I belonged there. I made sure that he could hear me. I wanted him to know how good of a singer I was. Maybe this would attract him to me. Maybe he would change his mind about us. I dried myself up with a towel then got dressed. I slowly crept next to him, silently.

He touched my thigh, and then turned me over to face him. He reached in between my thighs. He opened up my left lip and my right lip with his fingers and rubbed my clit. I could feel my vagina getting wet. I moaned then kissed him. He ran his tongue round my ear, inserting his penis inside of me. He thrust hard.

After our break-up, I dreaded the task of putting on the kettle and waiting for the water to boil. Taking the waskom and rinsing it before use, then rinsing it again afterwards. I didn't want to do it anymore. I realised that what attracted me to my ex-boyfriend was the fact that his house had a bathtub. I wondered why we couldn't get one.

Using a waskom is my dance. It is to stand on one leg to reach my other foot with my hand. It is to wriggle my buttocks as I wash my back. I have less than what others have, and yet I am expected to look the same – clean.

Chapter Twenty: THE KEY

I felt stuck in the asylum. Especially, because I didn't have my cell phone with me. I would be chatting with friends by now, but it seems like anything I would say to them would be judged as strange and inappropriate.

This feeling of being stuck takes me back to when we only had two keys in the house. One to open the front door and one to open the back door. My big sister was meant to watch me while our mother was out. She wasn't going to come back until the next day. My sister's boyfriend parked his car in front of the house and hooted for her to come out. In the car they both decided that she will spend the night with him. She rushed back in the house and took some of her clothes. She said she will return before I leave for school.

The following morning I tried to wait up for her, but she did not show. I went to school with the key to the back door as our mother had left with the front key. A thought to leave the back key under the trash can crossed my mind, but a second thought advised against it in case someone saw where I hid the key and got inside the house.

Unexpectedly, a teacher called me aside and said that a relative of mine had come to see me at school. As soon as I saw my big sister I was excited, I always liked it when family came to see me at school. She greeted me with a slap across my face and then asked me why I left with the key.

"Give it here," she said, her palm opened to receive the key.

I dug deep in my pockets and found the key. I gave it to her as she called me stupid, saying that she's made so many sacrifices to give my ungrateful ass an education.

"It's your fault we're poor," she said to me and then turned and walked away.

Drops of rain were beating on the asbestos roof. It was night time but I couldn't sleep. I thought of my father and tried to answer questions I had no answers to. Why did he leave? Did he still love me? Will he buy my school uniform? I began to cry and my big sister, sleeping behind me, could hear me. She asked me what I was crying about. I could not lie to her so I told her that I was crying about my father. I was wondering if he still loved me.

"You shouldn't cry like that," she said.

"Why not?" I asked.

"Because you will get sad and sick," she said.

She told me that the best thing to do was to move on. And when I asked her how this was done, she told me that every time I thought of my father I should not allow myself to cry. She said if I felt like crying, I was to hold back and swallow my tears. She said this would make things better for me and for everyone.

I tried what she said because she was my big sister and I could trust her on her word. But it failed, I started feeling worse. Holding yourself back from crying robs you of the release that comes with the act. What I was doing was bottling up all of my tears until they turned into resentment.

I acted out in my bad romance with Monica. I was madly in love with her in high school so much that I worshipped the shape of her brown feet, the shade of her tan lips and the scent on her neck. We never became a couple because I was afraid to tell her how I felt about her, but our friendship was intense.

We had quiet walks after school and long hugs for goodbyes. As we hugged I would wonder how it would feel like to rub my brown chest on her brown chest and how firm her breasts must have been. What hurt the most is that *she* was a lesbian who just wasn't that into *me*. Her silent treatments drew me closer to her because they matched the pain I had accumulated inside.

I cast mine eyes to the east, from whence comes the song of the black bird's nest. The wind of the bellowing cows. My father who rests at sea. I fill my pot with the waters from our river bed. It overflows, till it spills over his feet like milk at dawn. The leopard who watches over us, dancing by the riverbank. His body my ministry, in praise of the sun.

The ghosts called out to me, "Nobenguni." And I was awake. I did not know what the name meant. I did not believe that it could be mine because my name is Thobeka. I can't remember how I realised it, or I might have asked my mother, that my father is the one who had named me Nobenguni.

Nobenguni is a name given to the firstborn daughters of my clan. My clan name is Nozulu, Mpafane, Thukela, Kheswa, of which the firstborn sons are named Thukela after the Thukela River. My father's friends have told me that the name Nobenguni is common among *amagqirha*.

I came home one night and over the fence was my sister, Siphokazi's, voice calling out to me. She said, "Thobeka, your dad has passed away." I did not know my dad, so what was she talking about? The last time I saw him, he pretended not to know who I was.

That night I brought the news to my mother who reacted with indifference. I began making beaded jewellery for myself. To connect to the afterlife.

Later, I had to go see his dead body. His face was cold as ice and felt like marble against my lips. I kissed his cheeks and said my last goodbyes.

The road to the outskirts of Port Elizabeth was long and rocky. It felt like we had walked on foot to get there. We had left Port Elizabeth by evening and we arrived there by night time. Already the uncles were waiting for us. They led us towards the rondavels and for a while we waited for the eldest of the uncles to arrive. We entered a rondavel that was very simple on the inside. The rondavel had no bed and all the women sat on a blanket on the floor. There was a bucket on one end of the rondavel and that was the only piece of furniture the rondavel had, the chairs were borrowed from nearby neighbours.

He spoke in parable, my uncle. It sounded like he was speaking about beasts on the road and accidents happening. It sounded as if he was thanking our ancestors for guiding our trip to *kwaMathole*. I could see my late father's wife sitting on the floor, drying her tears with a handkerchief. The night was cold outside. The wind was blowing against the rondavel. Everything was done in peace and harmony.

We moved to other rondavels and slept there for the night. My boyfriend at the time was with us and he joined the men's party for the night. I was separated from him and I shared a room with Nokuthula and Thuliswa, my younger sisters. My sister, Siphokazi, hadn't arrived yet.

In the morning we were woken up by a rooster and my aunt was already standing at the entrance of the bedroom, telling us to wake up. Nokuthula and Thuliswa woke up innocently as if on the night before they hadn't told me about their alcoholic escapades. We bathed in front of each other. We ate porridge with sugar in it. And we stood idling about. One of my sisters took a picture of me while I stood in the rondavel's entrance.

I was watching the mist on top of the hills. My boyfriend came to see me and he invited me to smoke weed with him. We took a walk together towards the bushes then we lit the joint. I told him that my father used to smoke weed too. He said, "well you are smoking for your father right now." We laughed about that, and then remained quiet for a while. He waited for me to finish the joint, and when I did, we returned to the rondavels.

My boyfriend and I returned to the fire and the pots that had meat and samp in them. Everybody there called me Nobenguni. "Nobenguni where have you been," they wanted to know. It was strange to me being called Nobenguni, but it was beautiful too.

We were gathered around a tree and were asked to read from what we had written for our father. My sister, Siphokazi, was standing next to me and then my sisters Nokuthula and Thuliswa. I held Nokuthula and Thuliswa's hands like the big sister that I was and found their hands trembling like mine.

Our uncles read out our letters to our late father. They started with my letter first. The first letter sounded English and out of place as compared to my sisters' letters that were written in isiXhosa. However, nobody was annoyed by this. Everybody understood what I was saying to my father.

I spoke about him leaving me at a very tender age of three. I spoke about him not recognizing me in the streets as I got older. And finally, how I had to argue with his wife, the woman who tried to prevent me from seeing my father's dead body at the funeral parlour.

My father's wife was afraid of me. I could tell because she kept avoiding my eyes. Despite what she was trying to do by putting a wedge between me and my dead father she looked like a very meek person. I wondered what their marriage was like. My uncles say it was a very short marriage because my father passed shortly after they married. I have so many uncles from my late father's side. Not only did he have brothers, but he also had friends. His friends arrived at the funeral wearing leather jackets and gold rings on their fingers. They looked like a gang. They gossiped and seemed to be close with my cousin-brother, Thukela.

My father's friends told Thukela that they thought it was Nokuthula and Thuliswa's mother, my step-mother, who bewitched my father and killed him. They whispered, saying that she was abusing him to the point that she once bit off his ear.

I was working and studying at this time – I was to wake up the next morning and attend my classes like I had not been to a funeral. That night, I looked at the black clothes I was wearing at the funeral and breathed into myself. I was searching for an emotion.

Everyone from my class sent their condolences. I never imagined losing a parent would be this theatrical. My cyber boyfriend asked me how it felt like losing a father and I told him that I did not know the man, so how could I feel anything? I continued dreaming about my late father, though.

Sometimes, in the dream, he would be walking in the hills, sometimes he would be in hospital and I would be searching for him. Sometimes he would see me and try to speak to me.

My cyber boyfriend tried to console me by reading an excerpt about the afterlife from an esoteric book. I do not understand how someone's existence could be summarised in a book.

Chapter Twenty-one: THE WHITE FEATHERED GENTLEMAN

There are no rooms in our asylum. No private rooms for each of us patients. We all sleep in an open ward where we can harm one another given the chance. At night I sleep with one eye open.

Was it like this for me even before I came here? One night, before the asylum, I was in my friend Sven's flat. He had recently moved in so his windows had no curtains yet. Sven left me in the house alone and had gone to visit his parents. He and I had known each other for a very short time, but he trusted me with his belongings. I made myself coffee, and then sat on the sofa where I slept. Just when I was relaxing into the sofa, I saw with the corner of my eye a figure watching me from the window. It was a figure in white feathers with black spots on his chest. His head rotated and returned back to its initial position.

The feathered gentleman had perched himself on the edge of Sven's balcony. I have seen him many times in the afternoon hunting for rats that trotted the dusty railroad of Kliptown. The window was still open; I had to make a move to close it. I walked closer to him when his beady eyes locked me in his raider. I said,

"Shoo! Shoo!"

And instead of flying away he spread his wings as if to threaten me. I quickly found the window latch and twisted it to close. He made a sudden jerk with his claws and then he was soaring in the violet sky. I wondered why he pursued me. What message was he there to bring? Was it my great-grandfather in animal form come to warn me about something? Or was it a sign of someone about to die? If someone was to die because of this bad omen, was it going to be someone from my side of the family or Sven's?

I didn't want to accept what I had seen, so I opened my laptop and then texted Hlompho to tell him that I was safe and was staying with a friend. I told him about the white feathered gentleman on the balcony and how I thought it was some kind of a sign. Hlompho received my message and texted himself laughing. I didn't know what it could mean, and the possibility of anyone knowing was bleak. So I decided to focus on the bright side that the white feathered gentleman was the presence of a great wisdom and that wisdom couldn't be a bad thing.

Chapter Twenty-two: UMVANDEDWA

One does not start to imagine how much he is missed. One cannot start to imagine how much he is cared for. One starts by apologizing; then all becomes right as rain.

With my eyes wide open my mind drifts off to thoughts about suicide. Not my suicide but my best friend Hlompho killed himself during the time of the Lesotho civil unrest in 2015. I found out about his death when I read an article on him stating that his brother found him in his apartment. I quickly went and checked his Facebook account, and there were his friends' farewells on his wall. No one knew why Hlompho had taken his life; none of us expected it would be him who is capable of such a thing.

A week after I had read the article, I told no one what had happened. I waited for Hlompho to write a status update on his account telling us that it was all a joke. Or at least that maybe he was being chased by soldiers and had to pretend that he was dead. Could it be that they had assassinated him? Someone had to take the blame, not Hlompho.

While cooking I thought of him, while washing the dishes I thought of him, while in a taxi to town I thought of him. I sent him an inbox on his account, and asked, "Hlompho, are you still there?" I thought he would text me back and tell me a secret. But no one responded. There was no way of talking to him ever again.

Chapter Twenty-two: I SEE LIFE THAT SEES ME THROUGH ITS DAYS

I was not always like this, just a vegetable that's lost the zest for life, smoking snuff in the toilet with the likes of Wildcat. Ten years ago, I was riding a taxi to Straundale, wearing blue jeans and a grey sweater, when I thought of my old teacher. He was in his late twenties, and wore a broad smile across his brown face. He jerked his head backwards when he spoke, as if to get a better look at the person he was speaking with. He walked with a freedom in his stride, and brought jokes to his audience. In his first class with us, he asked that I stand in front of the classroom, and introduce myself.

Something about him made me think that he was special. He seemed unique, different from the other teachers. He let me near enough for him to feel like we were friends. This way, it was easier for me to trust him. I told the class my name, and told them about my thoughts around addiction to painkillers. He probed me on why I thought of addiction for my topic. And I said that it was because I had a relative who was suffering from the addiction.

I could tell that he was bewildered by my reflection. I sounded burdened. But my burdens drew us closer, as he invited me to a debate team, and drama club, to help me socialize. I met my seniors for the first time through his drama club. "My name is Thobeka," I said to them in a formal voice, to which they responded with a crackle of laughter. One of them said I should loosen up.

My teacher thought of taking me on a tour through town. He wanted me to see the Campanile Tower, and the city harbour. I went home and told my big sisters, they told my mother, and the whole family decided that we couldn't afford the trip. My teacher was counting on me coming on the trip, he said if my mother could pay what she can, he could cover the rest. I went on the boats at the harbour and walked up the two hundred and four steps at the Campanile with the rest of the class.

My teacher stuck around after school, giving me ideas on topics I should use in the debate team. He learned that I write poetry too, and wanted me to show my art- and English teachers. As years passed, I noticed him dropping weight, and he wasn't attending to work as often as he used to. Sometimes he took months off until one morning at the school assembly, they announced his passing.

I was asked to stand in as a poet at his memorial service, so I prepared this poem for him:

"I see life that sees me through its days, walks me through spaces of its light rays. I sit and ponder its dark ways. Sow the thoughts as I start to pray, I start to pray for God's gaze." As I recited this poem, my eyes rested on the sea of students and teachers who were listening. I awkwardly waited for a clapping of hands when I finished, then realised that this was a memorial service, not a concert. I stepped down, and walked over to my seat when the girl I was in love with said that everyone thought it was deep that I had shaved my head for him. The truth being, I shaved my head to stop my sister from making me do hairstyles I didn't want.

Chapter Twenty-three: HE WILL ASK FOR TEA

If not the hand of another that takes me, it will be my own hand that ends me. Death in the arms of the one.

A demon first knocks on your door like a benevolent angel. You will open for him with an open heart thinking nothing more of him than your friend. You will exchange greetings and he will ask for tea. He will sit down on the sofa and tell you about the weather. When he stalks you, you will never see him coming. You will both be on your feet, standing, when he reaches out for your body. He will not say a word but breathe nervously, like he knows what he is about to do is wrong but he cannot stop himself. You will feel a sudden rush of blood to your head and a thump from your heart. You will hear your heart and veins beating in your brain. The grabbing will be violent and abrupt. There will be an unnatural shaking of the bodies. You will fail to find your voice. The first thought will be *it is my fault. I let him in here. Now he is touching me. Now he is undressing me. Why can't I stop him? Why can't I scream? Please, I am afraid of you, is that what you want?*

I crawled onto the sofa and tucked my knees under my chin, trembling with tears streaming down my cheeks and thoughts racing in my head. I waited for my mother to come home from church as her friend left the house that evening. *Should I tell my mother or should I not?* That was the question. She did her secret knock on the door, and I stood up and opened it. It took five minutes for me to say,

“Can I tell you something?”

I told her that her friend came by to check on her and had decided to wait for her as I told him that she was not in the house. I made him tea and he stood up and then locked the door. After doing that, he then touched me. When I said this to my mother, all she could say about it was that the devil made him do it. And because the devil made him do it, she was going to pray about it.

The next day, however, she called her comrades to accompany her to his place. What transpired thereafter is a warning for him to move out of his house and relocate to another neighbourhood before they could make fatal plans about his existence. My mother came back that day and told me that she had made him go away. I was never going to see that man again.

Except that I did see him in my dreams. I shaved my hair to make myself look different so he wouldn't recognize me in the streets. I bought clothes from the boy's aisle and shifted my steps to walk like a boy. I suppressed my voice to sound deep because I hated the thing that drove him to do what he did to me.

Chapter Twenty-four: INTAMBO NAMAKHUBALO

In prayer we must be high, and refuse to be lowered. We must rise up, instead of being pushed down.

I did everything right. But I ended up in the asylum anyway. I remember my goat. Intambo yam was going to be made from its fur. They were going to slaughter the goat and say “*Camagu*,” when it bellows. I held my goat by its horns as it urged its head towards me. I was going to be introduced to my family spirits. We believe that they can speak to children, through dreams. And that when it’s time for the child to be made *intambo*, they will send a family totem through a dream. Holding the goat means that the child will face life’s challenges with courage. That is what my uncle said to me when he was standing behind the goat. The goat’s fur was kneaded into a single strand and needled through a set of white beads. *Amagqirha*’s heels slapping the floor along with their songs. For the first time, I heard *iziduko zam* recited to me.

I fell sick the following winter. My mother’s solution was to ask *igqirha lakhe* to heal me. So, in the middle of the night, my mother and I went to *igqirha*’s house and sat inside her bedroom. We sat on a grass mat, next to the different medicine on the floor. She made me swallow black powder, then she told us that from now on I will no longer be alone.

She said I had three spirits inside of me, and that each spirit had a personality. UMkhonto kaShaka, Linda, and School-boy were their names. She said I will no longer walk alone or eat alone. These spirits were not my family spirits, but were to be my friends. They would warn me of danger, and protect me when I am asleep. From now on, I would sleep with three more beasts breathing with me, and six more eyes watching the night.

I was taught to make sure that these spirits were appeased. When I felt moody or angry, I was to buy myself a litre of Coca Cola and a quarter of chicken. Boil the chicken, and season it with nothing but salt. Eat only the wing, and drink the coke with a dash of gin. Mkhonto kaShaka spoke in isiZulu and he moved like a tiger. Linda was kind and forgiving. School-boy guided me through the streets of my hood when I walked home from school.

Chapter Twenty-five: RDP

Our food is very wholesome in the asylum. We have three meals a day without needing to work for it. We don't have to have jobs, we don't have to go grocery shopping, it is delivered to us in plastic platters and utensils. We have full meals, without fail, and some bread and tea for snacks. In primary school we used to have Reconstruction and Development Programme which was the slice of bread and milk or soup we were given at lunch. I had my sliced peanut butter sandwich and powder milk in my hands passing through wild children to get to my desk when another child bumped into me and my food fell to the floor. The boy was playing with water, squirting it in people's faces and then running away before he could get caught. He bumped into me whilst on the run.

I felt uMkhonto kaShaka, Linda, and School-boy rising inside of me. I chased after the boy across the school field and when I caught him I growled and beat him. The teachers came to see what was going on and I passed out as they were weaving their way to us. They took me to the principal's office and I could hear the boy say, "It's like she wasn't herself."

The school called my mother to tell her that a child has no right to hit another child and that she must look into the causes of my violent behaviour. She promised to look into it and took me home with her. On the way home she said she knew I was struggling with keeping control of my spirits but I would have to learn. Ever since that day children have teased me, saying I am a witch and that I have superhuman powers when I am angry.

Chapter Twenty-six: CONVERSION

Wildcat led our prayer every morning. I was not sure if it was because she was stout or because of her background as a prophet in her church. Yet, even if Wildcat had an experience in preaching, she had no business preaching to us when she was the same as the rest of us. In this regard, maybe the ancestors were by her side. Wildcat was not different from me like Father Ted was. Father Ted from our community Catholic Church that my big sister used to go to was a white man. There was a scandal about Father Ted in the community. Him being a priest meant that he was not allowed to wed or have any children, but one night he fell into a stupor and impregnated a black woman. Nevertheless, the community was quick to forgive him because he changed the status quo of apartheid in the country and taught himself to speak IsiXhosa.

Father Ted was adored by many that they gave him a Xhosa clan name for himself to pass on to his son. His son lived his life with his father's Xhosa given name and his father practicing as a priest. Father Ted met me in his theology class. We had small gatherings for the youth and he spoke about having me as the club's representative. On his way to Ireland, he thought to drive passed my house and bring me a milk tart and a gift wrapped in a paper bag.

I was inside when he knocked on the front door. He called out my name but I wouldn't open for him because I was afraid of what might happen like what happened the last time I was alone. He left the packages next door and drove off. Later that day my mother went next door to pick up the package. We opened it and inside the paper bag was a pink woollen jersey. It had a tag on it written, IRELAND. When Father Ted left the congregation some individuals left as well, including my big sister. I also stopped going there.

Chapter Twenty-seven: WE WILL BRAG

Even though I didn't agree with the way Wildcat behaved, such as running her tongue to the ward nurses about her love life, I learned that you could become friends with a person you didn't necessarily like. Wildcat got me through the roughest of places since my township schooling days. Some township schools have Nguni names like motivational speeches. Certain schools are named "We will brag" or "Let us hold together" or "Wealth." A few have dead heroes' names, like "James Jolobe" or "Douglas Mbopha" or "Mqhayi." You will find that these names are powerful ideas being passed down for generations and yet not so powerful so as to alleviate the stench.

Most township schools have ceilings falling apart, and in my school, at "We will brag," we had a problem with shit. There was shit all over the place. There was animal shit and human shit. Animal shit, because the cows and the goats used to pass through the gaping fence. Human shit, because our toilets wouldn't flush.

Human shit was unbearable. When you are in a line waiting for your next class, the stench of shit would travel like a green cloud of faeces from inside the girls' and boys' toilets to the corridors where you stand. In your mind, you can imagine the size of the shit, its colour, and its position.

If you looked closely, you could see shit on the walls, as if no one cared to wipe themselves using toilet paper, but rather the walls to clean up after themselves. In the girls' toilet, the smell of shit was mingled with the smell of menstrual blood. And you could see menstrual pads on the floor. The boys' toilet had the smell of strong urine.

I heard once that a child drowned in a school toilet, but that is not the worst I have heard. At "We will brag" there was found a dead boy shot in the head inside the boys' toilets. Nobody knew who had done it, but since the day his body was found, everybody in our township felt like "We will brag" was by far the most unsafe school in the neighbourhood.

Chapter Twenty-eight: THE GREEN WINGED GENTLEMAN

The doctors told me that I was bipolar, but I thought only of the green winged gentleman. I remember the green winged gentleman perched on the collar of my school shirt. His arms bent like he was in prayer. I couldn't kill him because in our culture we revere the praying mantis for bringing rain and blessings. I had just been awarded a silver medal for representing "We Will Brag" at an Olympiad. It's as if the praying mantis was there to congratulate me.

I wrote a poem about him and kept it in my diary. I was to read the poem to remind myself of his qualities: introspection, meditation, and his slim body. I was having beer with my friends at a festival, except for my shamanic friend who couldn't taste a drop of liquor,

"Because," he said,

"My ancestors would punish me if I did."

He could smoke a joint though, so he took a drag as I shared my poem with them.

"Umntanezulu is a totem for ooNozulu," he said,

"We say ooNozulu are the children of the heavens as they are connected to umntanezulu."

"Ever noticed how you feel when it's winter?" he asked,

"Ever felt depressed? And then when spring comes?"

"Yes, but what are you getting at," I asked.

"You feel depressed because the heavens reflect what is inside of you and what is inside of you reflects the heavens," he said,

"You are connected Nozulu."

The praying mantis appeared again after I had alighted from a theatre stage. He was waiting for me by the doorstep of my house. I took a picture of him with my camera phone. Was it better this way, to see my bipolar not as a problem but as something with meaning? Not as a disconnection but a connection with nature and my people?

Chapter Twenty-nine: THE WALL

In the darkness of the night the nurses would stay up drinking tea and chattering about the latest gossip. The gossip would run along the lines of so and so who killed so and so in the townships. These stories would scare me and remind me of the night burglars were knocking down my door. I did not think twice about it, I just sprang to my mother's room, with them on my heels. I slammed the door shut on his face, and he kicked it back. It was a struggle between my half naked body and his balaclava face. Something like an axe hacked on the wood. Until my mother begged them to take whatever they wanted and leave. They left with our computer and DVD, but their violence stayed with me.

A wall had to be built to separate us from them. This thought kept me up at night. I had saved up for it, around ten thousand in the bank. It was going to be my very first major project, aside from buying the washing machine. Before, there was a wooden fence. It was ugly. It made us look like we were poor. Nobody could take anyone seriously with that kind of a fence.

The wooden fence was built by *amaphara* from the neighbourhood. It took them weeks to build the fence, and months to fix it when it fell down. I saved enough money to hire an established business. It took me four years to have the money. The builders asked me about the type of brick I wanted, and if I had bought the cement. I became anxious as I had no idea about these things.

My anchor was the verses from the bible that spoke about heroes who built a temple for God. Except, I was building a wall for my mother. This task took every bit of my strength. It was almost as if I was going to lay the bricks myself. I could feel their heaviness on my hands. I took walks around campus to get used to my greatness. If I could build a wall, I could create a new meaning in my life.

Months later, I came home to a thick wall. It made us look like we were progressing. Now that there was a boundary set, the neighbours could respect someone with boundaries. The wall kept all the commotion out.

Chapter Thirty: UNBECOMING

In the asylum I was quieter than usual. I had become so much of a silence that it was unbecoming of me to be sound. I was stoned by the same love that drove me out of a dark place. I lit up like a lover prone to etch a name in caves as we crashed in the woods and brainstormed our future. Waves of passion made patterns that would soon wear us out because I was crushed by an idea about myself.

I was stoned by love. Yawned my light-bringer's name at dawn. Sentenced to verse a lifetime of vows. Wrapped around his body where passion burned until it burned out. Until memories of one another hovered in space and twinkled like precious stones. I saw my wedding ring and myself carrying, all in my highness.

My shame has always been there, lying by the crossroads with street signs that read the known and the unknown. It was a heavy subject that neither my closest friends nor my furthest of foes could evade my broken heart and my mind opening. When life was loss, it came and went like a reflection in a grain of sand, a mirage and an oasis of sweaty hands. It was a time to no end.

There was no TV in the TV room, which made me miss my TV back home. Voices of black women on television complained about their body fat and how fat they think they really were. Their voices said that they are discriminated for being fat. Who in Africa of all places criticized black women for their obesity? South Africa taught me that African men prefer to date fat black women by pointing their fingers at me and saying that I had no breasts and no ass, I couldn't possibly keep a man warm in winter.

My skinny frame was the subject of ridicule. I was a black girl so how come I could not gain weight? At school, and sometimes on my way to the spaza shop, kids thought I was anorexic. I could feel everyone's eyes on me scanning every twitch my body made. They scanned my long arms and legs and I quivered. Most of them judged that I was indeed not good enough.

They named me *Tyos* short for *Bhityos*, the skinny one. Old men asked me whether I am a man or a woman. Porn only revealed fat black women. Men only stared at fat black women and compared these women's buttocks. I thought a lot about how much I hated fat women who made me sit at the back of the taxi because of my size. They would smile at me and ridicule my body and I would sit there like a coward to these women who copied women from America lying about being discriminated against. I was the one excluded from my community, not them. I also wished to belong in a mould.

I only found my size in the kiddies section. I was not growing so for many years people spoke to me like I was a child. My existence was that of a coward. I bought whey powder that never worked. The doctors questioned my nutrition. My cyber boyfriend tried to change the way I walked. My best friend coached my choice in clothing making me choose tiny dresses so I could 'fit in'. The more they tried to change me the more their standards were set in stone.

Chapter Thirty-one: MAMNGUNI

Before I came here, I walked down an alley that led to an old arts gallery in town one day. There was a seminar at the market square but I stole away to spend my cents on something I could admire. Inside the clustered gallery I could see all kinds of wooden crafts and stone vases. At the furthest end of the gallery I could see things that looked like wooden dolls.

As I walked closer I realised that these were not dolls but music instruments. They were music instruments made of wood, string, and calabash. I saw one instrument that looked different than the rest: it had no paint on it, which made it look older. I picked it up and asked the cashier what it was and she said it's an African harp. I fell in love with it immediately. I had always wanted to own a harp.

When I hugged it, it fit into my body like an infant child.

I told my cyber boyfriend that I had gotten the African harp and he said he thought it was cool and now I could teach myself some music. I asked him if he thought I could learn and he said yes. He thought that in time I would be able to play my harp.

I called it Mamnguni, after a string instrument I saw on Google called the ngon. I thought it looked like her. I sent my cyber boyfriend recordings of me playing it. He started talking about me playing it live on stage. On the nights when he was feeling aroused he would say that playing my instrument is like having sex, you tease the strings until you reach the climax.

When I first played my harp I never thought that my cyber boyfriend's words would ever bother me. But I was wrong because they did.

"Playing a music instrument is like having sex, you tease the strings until you reach a climax," he said.

He also said that I teased him by sending recordings of me playing my harp and that seeing me play tantalised him.

It was the way my nimble fingers touched the strings that got him excited. The way the tempo increased. Seeing me play my harp made him want to see me naked. This meant that it was my fault entirely. And because, deep down inside, I wanted to impress him by picking up this hobby, I let him create a new soul in me and steal my old soul. I couldn't play the harp with him and couldn't play it without him.

He loved how innocent I looked, he said. I came to know things I had not known before. Heartless is an understatement of what he was. Blasphemy against love sounds more like what he had done. It was all a game of desire to him, no matter how much I loved him. He changed me from a naïve girl from the country side to the girl who went out into the big city and got lost. How can a harlot touch a holy harp?

Playing Mamnguni in front of large crowds who couldn't care less what my cyber boyfriend had done to me was not what I wanted. I no longer wanted to pretend. So I regressed and placed Mamnguni firmly safe in the corner of my bedroom.

Chapter Thirty-two: EXCERPT ABOUT THE AFTERLIFE

In the Kabbalah, God has a special name, and this special name, only the chosen sages were allowed to utter it. One means the wholeness of God. Seven means God's blessing. Ten stands for Yod, the name I tattooed on my arm. I learned the power of changing my birth-name. I had a zillion other nicknames as a result of that. And with each name, I was reborn. I was irreligious and apolitical. My friends called me Sage. I tattooed Ka on the back of my neck to remind me of immortality with the golden ratio, Phi, on my right shoulder.

I was the descendant of the great god, Kaggen, the praying mantis. The skies were connected to me because of his prayers. Green was the colour that would lead me to my destiny. I would find love there. My soulmate could have been a Gemini or a Pisces, an Aries, or even a Libra. My mother is a Leo. She is stuck with me like a tattoo.

Becoming Sage helped me navigate my shadow, but the enlightenment that called me also came with a blindspot. The more I thought I could pacify my shadow, the more it evaded me. When it evaded me, I found my hand wrapped around a puppy dog's neck, straggling it to death while looking into my lover's eyes. Sometimes I would be in the middle of the road, screaming and telling him I am a void without him.

I have woken up from a deep induced sleep from an operating table. The doctors were taking out my inflamed appendix. They said I wouldn't wake up for an hour; they had to prick my earlobe. I hallucinated the whole night that night, seeing my friends when they were not there.

I was in recovery in the same ward with an old woman who kept cussing at her children for abandoning her. That is why I wasn't surprised to see a lot of older women behaving like little children in the asylum.

Chapter Thirty-three: MY BOYFRIEND WHO PLAYED ME

Before I came here, I wanted to kill my cyber boyfriend. I planned it, in my head. I knew that my late father's friends would do the job for me if I paid them with liquor. My story of what he did to me was not enough. My uncles would need more motivation.

I wanted my cyber boyfriend to feel the shards of pain my heart had after he'd left. I wanted those pieces to cut his feet, in every step he took in running away from me. He swore to loving me no matter what. He played a victim very well, telling me about how he had been wronged by society.

He looked for solace in me. He looked for confidence. I gave him all that I had, my money, my attention, including all that could hold me together again. He switched roles and went out with his friends again. He regained what I thought he had lost. His attachment to me faded as mine grew stronger. I became the one who needed him now.

I needed him to hold me as I held him when he was falling apart. That is all I ever wanted. But what I asked for decreased to nothing but a fantasy. Having his baby was not going to happen. Marrying him was not going to happen. He'd play his way out of every question. The thought of him cheating made my blood boil.

I wanted to kill him. And I also didn't. I wanted to love him. Why couldn't he love me? He deserved to get punished. The world needed to know that I was with a player. A childish man only after what he wants and nothing else. He hadn't evolved yet. Was incapable of shame.

PART TWO: OUTSIDE-IN

Chapter Thirty-four: THE INTERVIEW

Wildcat wanted to be a fashion designer. Currently, she was just a bipolar patient getting paid with the government grant to afford herself food and medicine. She had a daughter and no job. She lived with her mother too, just like me. I remember when I was waiting to be picked for a course at my old university. Months passed by and they were excruciating. Their silence led me to think that I might have not made it to the finals. Just when I was about to give up, I received an email giving me the great news. It was like a dream to me. I only knew of this school from an insert on TV and now they were inviting me to come and study with them. Amazing.

What's also exciting is that I would live nearby my cyber boyfriend's house. I would be in the same province as him. I assumed that this news would make him happy and that he would even propose that we live together. I assumed wrong. He only called me for sex and didn't care where I was staying and what I was eating. On top of all that he didn't want me near his place unless he particularly planned the event.

I worked for the campus radio and showed my cyber boyfriend that I too can be a radio host like he does for his podcast. If he understood that, he could think of a wonderful future we could have as two ambitious individuals.

There was a girl who lived next door to me. She liked coming to my dorm asking for eggs. She used to hook up a lot with her boyfriend and roll her eyes when I told her that a part of my research will be looking into virginity testing.

I played the stringed melodies from Mamnguni's bosom. My head lecturer and his two assistants were impressed. They looked at the drawing I had made during our practical interview, and they saw shades of green outlining the limbs of a praying mantis. I told them that I believed that the praying mantis was my spirit guide and it had led me there. I told them I was destined for the opportunity to study with them.

Chapter Thirty-five: THE CLEANER

If I should die of hunger at this res, then, let me die happily with the door shut behind me, and the lights turned off with the damned alarm. Get me a short dreaded dark-skinned girl with her fist above her head high on poetry masquerading as my muse.

The cleaners came by my flat twice a week. When I got back from my classes I would find that they cleaned the bathtub, the shower, the kitchen, and made the bed. There would be nothing left for me to do except to make myself dinner and hit the books. This kind of life helped to let my thoughts flow easily because I was not expected to finish other tasks. My focus was on my work and on my cyber boyfriend.

I had to run into the cleaners once in a while. In all those times it was not easy. Especially if the cleaner was not a friendly person. What would make it awkward would be the colour of our skin. A black woman cleaning another black woman's house makes things awkward because the only difference between the two of you is your level of education. This may be the cause of other saucy relationships between the cleaners and their tenants, not the innate bad attitude of either of the parties but the race tension between the two.

One morning I decided to stay in my flat and not attend class and a cleaner came in for room service. She was a short petite young woman about my age or younger. Us being the same age made matters worse because we were at the same stages of our lives. This became apparent in the way she spoke to me as if she was also deciding on which level of respect she should give me. She started asking me stupid questions like,

"Are you also a student here?"

As if to point out that if fate had it differently, we would have our roles swapped and she would be in my shoes. Or even: I didn't deserve to be where I am because most black girls end up as cleaners or sex-workers. She gave me her phone number and asked me to tell her when my department is looking for new students. She told me that her friend's child wanted to study drama and she's been waiting to speak to the right person who can help her from the inside. I being that right person.

They seemed to change cleaners every six months because I never saw her again. In her place was another cleaner about my age but this one was a lot meaner. She made grunts while she cleaned like she did not want to do her job. Or maybe she blamed me for it. Like, if I didn't exist, the job wouldn't be there to do and she wouldn't have to do it.

"Move your feet," she shouted at me one time.

She never said hello when she came in or goodbye when she left which made me feel like she really hated me for some reason.

"I am sick, that's why I stayed in from class today," I said to her.

"So?" she said,

“Your feet aren’t sick, you’re just lazy. I hate that you’re lazy.”

It was confirmed, she did have a reason to hate me. I resolved to keeping my mouth shut and staying out of her way. I wasn’t even going to try to be nice to her.

Chapter Thirty-six: UNIVERSITY

“Do you hear voices?”

“No.”

“Do you see things?”

“No.”

“Do you think that there’s someone after you, someone sabotaging your life?”

“Yes. I think someone doesn’t want me to graduate. She has banned me from returning to her university.”

“Why do you think she is doing that?”

“Because she’s racist.”

“Have you ever had suicidal thoughts?”

The corner through which my universe expanded was inside the labs of the university. There were some students working overnight, and making phone-calls to long distance beloveds. There were the clicking of keypads and through the window, the raving of one mad man outside.

I lived in that corner of the lab for six months. Watching the comings and goings of all the students. They were young and certain that they would never end up like me. The mad man would stand outside the lab’s burglar doors and call out to a student sitting in the lab to be let in.

It would get cold at night, so I would get on my knees and push the windows closed as hard as I could. I would listen to the sound of the wind before closing my eyes. My body heat would increase and lull me to sleep. The mad man would be so drunk, he would hallucinate all his memories in combat.

Asiwafun’amagwala! His voice rang in my head like it must have in ghastly pits of his soul. I was haunted by his memories, sharing a sit in his torment. Rubbing shoulders with his demons. Falling in the abyss of his delirium. I grew to expect the mad man every night, as if I was cursed to see his apparition.

Going to the university’s rallies, and wearing their flag on my head, led me to trusting the mad man and his politics. I heard his voice in me whispering that I should stand up from where I was resting and burst out into speech.

I felt entitled to giving speeches because of my situation, and because I wanted it to change. The whole crowd listened in front of the Great Hall. The Great Hall was the epicentre of my success. And I spoke for a cause.

I believed that I was hanging in the balance, and that unseen spirits were pulling the strings. I worked with Memory; I shook Memory by the hand. And I made demons too.

None of the students honestly liked me. They were just moths circling around a globe. Just because it was lit. Like slaves waiting for freedom. I spoke not to relieve them of their slavery, but to relieve myself of my burden. I spoke until I could not be quietened.

But my dreams grew loose and frail. I felt the six limbs of lord Shiva wrapped around my chest. I could not breathe. My head throbbed and it was time for me to pee. I am not proud of what I did to survive, but I am not sorry for it. I was deprived of what I needed. So, when everyone left, I took my flask and squatted in my corner of the lab to press the pee out.

I was reading *The Science of Self-Realisation* when the mad man reappeared to me. He said if I carried on reading like this, I would go mad. I thought that was ironic, coming from him. But I did end up jailed. I did wind up drifting away from reality and into the laughing whispers of this mad man.

When I woke up, I was somewhere and I saw two naked women running from nurses. One of them wanted to masturbate and the other wanted to fight. The other patients, draped in hospital tunics, were sitting on benches and playing with their toes on artificial grass.

Chapter Thirty-seven: REHEARSAL FOR A REVOLUTION

We rehearsed every morning until evening, flexing our muscles until they fell into the desirable shapes. We learned about invisible theatre where protestors could invade a spot and perform against a certain cause. We learned about how modern day living takes away the liberal movements of the body and how to free the body from conformity. I spent my evenings watching plays and seeing how their bodies move on stage. The way they kept their lines for long dialogues was magic to me.

Notable shows I have seen are *Ukutshona koMendi*, *The Colour Purple*, and *The Man in the Green Jacket*. I learned that you could tell a story that is from the past and bring it to present day life, and you can adopt an American story and present it for our audience. I wondered if I would make it as far as producing international shows for our stage. It would be the pinnacle of my career.

It was not just getting to watch shows that excited me but also the way in which I was allowed to watch. I was able to rub shoulders with the VIPs. I was a VIP myself as our tickets were reserved. I could meet friends who were already successful actors and hang out with them like I could afford to. My survivor's guilt and impostor complex were hitting me hard.

I invited a friend I made from New York to see *Ukutshona koMendi* with me. She was a lesbian, but I wasn't into her and she wasn't into me. She loved the sound of the shamanic drum music and the smoke from the incense they were burning. She said although Johannesburg reminded her of New York, seeing the play gave her a little corner of Africa.

You've left me at the computer labs waiting for you. Have they gotten to you, making it hard for me to reach out to you? But we matter to me.

Chapter Thirty-eight: KIND STRANGERS

I would leave my bags in the computer labs and head off to the showers in the sport's building before anyone saw me. This was one of those days, except when I went back to re-organize my corner, I found a young woman waiting for me. She said that she wanted to take me aside to speak to me. I went outside with her and then she told me her name was Kamo and she wanted to know my name. I introduced myself and then she asked me what was going on and why was I sleeping in the labs.

I told her that I had lost my accommodation and had some debt that wouldn't allow me to register. She held her hand to her mouth and started crying. I waited for her to stop, then she asked if she could see me again. I told her that this lab was where she would find me. She said she would buy me soap and toothpaste because she imagined that I couldn't afford these. I could afford toiletries with my tutoring salary. But I let her do what she thought needed to get done.

A few days after meeting Kamo, a student Bongani, who noticed me in the labs, came over to speak to me while I was surfing the internet. He had with him a plastic bag full of food. He placed the plastic bag on the computer desk and said he thought of buying me a hotdog and chips and some cool-drink. I thanked him and became friends with him a short while from that day on.

I kept receiving surprise bar soaps and toothpaste from Kamo. Bongani brought me lunch in the afternoon. He even brought me his hoodie for the cold nights.

Later I heard from one of the social workers at the counselling clinic that my therapist was terminally ill, so I went over to the counselling clinic to see her. When I got there I made myself coffee then settled myself on the sofa. She came out walking slowly and shaky. She sat down next to me and whispered in a weak voice. She confided in me that she was afraid of dying and leaving her husband behind. Together we prayed.

I left her alone then went to sit outside on the lawn. I closed my eyes and basked in the sun. Little did I know that someone was watching me. His name was Jagganath, a Hare Krishna devotee. He wanted to know which meditations I was doing. I asked him to close his eyes and try to take ten breaths in and then ten breaths out. When he opened his eyes on the last breath he looked at me and said he has learned something new.

He asked me where I lived, and I told him I slept in the computer labs. He was so shocked he wanted to see it for himself so I took his phone number and promised to contact him about a visit. He wasn't a student but had a special pass that could allow him in and around campus. Sadly, I lost his number while moving from the labs to my new place of residence.

Chapter Thirty-nine: LOST IN TRANSLATION

I was lying on the grass on the library lawns and saw one of the students I knew from the computer labs. I called out to him and waved and said,

“You guys like laughing, huh,” which I thought they did. If you saw them together you would always hear them laughing which made the topics they were talking about really interesting. One was tall and skinny, the other one was taller and chubby with a dark complexion. They liked to gossip about the political members of the SRC and whose wife cheated on whom. I didn’t judge this talk, they seemed to know what they were talking about and it made politics seem a lot fun.

This day I was seeing the skinny light skinned one, and the next day the dark one came over to where I was sitting and started yelling at me.

“You have a problem with us?” he said.

“No, what gave you that idea?” I asked.

“I know you have a problem with us laughing but we would never laugh at you and your situation,” he said, and he couldn’t let me say anything,

“Why would you think we were laughing at you? We have our lives to live, okay.”

I could not believe this was happening to me. This dude was clearly unaware that I had no problem with them laughing instead I was giving them a compliment. I was embarrassed for him for thinking that they were wrong for confronting me about it. I also felt embarrassed that they were thinking about *my situation*.

After yelling at me for a good fifteen minutes he stormed off without any remorse for what he had just done. I’ve never seen a person so adamant that they were right and the other person was wrong beyond reasonable doubt. I sank in my bench and thought about it for a second, then I thought about what I was going to have for lunch.

Chapter Forty: DEAR KATLEGO

Fragments of broken mirror on the floor. It's real: I've counted my seven years of bad luck.

Wildcat gave us morning sermons, prophecies, she smoked snuff and prayed to her ancestors like a real *gqirhakazi*. She taught me the relevance of believing. To believe in something so badly that it manifests itself. I believed in her, although she had flaws. I believed that her prayers could get us out of there. Out of the evening pills and the morning pills.

After a while, I saw what I had been. Homeless, in a corner of a lab. Homeless, but open. Open to welcome in all the sounds of the city. Johannesburg city. Never at rest. Just jostling through life. But I could not fathom my alleged insanity. It seemed like everyone thought I was crazy because I spoke the truth.

I wrote for survival. I had to write my way out of there. I wrote of hope. I wrote of myself, winning. I wrote about climbing out of the abyss. Most of the women in the asylum thought I was spying on them. But I wasn't. I was writing to save my life.

I wrote of Katlego, my vegan boyfriend who didn't want me to eat meat. His sweet smile after an exhilarating laughter and joy I once felt knowing that I am the reason for his laughter. I wrote like it was a proclamation of love in a corrupt state. A love flying amidst skyscrapers. Singing in the midst of erected concrete. A love non-reciprocal. Rejected by fate. I wrote about those borders that grew us apart.

I wrote to Katlego, as if he was going to read it. I wrote: My home was in your hands, Katlego, when you came to see me at the computer labs that time. Every time you thought of dinner, and remembered bath time, and us kissing in between. My home was in your heart once, when you spoke about your mom and dad and the demons that lived in you ever since their divorce.

I stayed in Johannesburg for you, to keep seeing your glorious face. And to feel your breath on my nipples. To feel you caressing me and thrust me in empty classrooms. With only the blackboard glaring at us. We made sure to avoid the security cameras.

Chapter Forty-one: THE TUTOR

I worked as a tutor at the university. Even as my private life crumbled, my public life was intact. I would be on time for every lesson and had established a relationship with my students. The first thing I told them about myself is that I like philosophy and Jared Leto. I was tutoring critical thinking. Having the job and dating Katlego made me feel like Whoopi Goldberg in *Sarafina*. I lived these different lives.

Most importantly both roles in both my lives were played by a hero. A person who could lead the way and author solutions. I was the enlightened one. And soon, I was going to be able to afford a life with myself and Katlego in Johannesburg. He would call me before my classes ended to find out what was for dinner. I loved taking care of him and knowing that he depended on that. I loved having him as my secret that no one knew about. They saw him only as my smile when I answered his calls.

That year brought a spring to my step. But soon I would have to accept that things would stop getting better. I would lose my accommodation and go on begging. I would attend tea meetings with my colleagues like nothing was happening. And I would live with the aching fear of losing Katlego. It was becoming even harder to hide my hardship from my students.

Sooner or later my clothes would show that they were neither ironed nor washed. My hair wouldn't be combed. I would no longer walk between their desks like I used to, due to the fear of sweating. The more I felt self-conscious, the more I started forgetting things and needing help from my students. The more I couldn't help the students who were bunking my class because of financial issues of their own.

Chapter Forty-two: BLOOD

I feel like crying and puking at the same time.

I get depressed within the fourteen days of my menstrual cycle. It is called PMS. But I call it going to the moon. I feel fatigued during this time. And pensive. I get anger and shame, and think of life as useless. The most bizarre thing I experience is my dreams. I get lucid dreams. Mostly about *amagqirha* chanting psalms, or winged individuals.

When I dream like this, I know there will be blood tomorrow. My flow is heavy, lasting for seven days. It releases a burden off my shoulders. But I can feel my ankles thump. The pains follow. Right below my belly button. Like a fist squeezing and releasing an orange.

Katlego's penis feels odd inside me. I didn't feel like it. But he wanted it so badly. Begging me, "I can tell spiritual things about you just by inserting myself into you." Lusting over my blood. He talks about my family's pathology and compares me to his aunt. He reckons I won't end up married. Why am I with him, then?

He sends shivers to my bones, the way he thrusts inside of me. Slowly breathing into my neck, slithery like a snake. Harder. Faster. Sending tingles to my cramps. My blood on the towel beneath our naked bodies. Weed smoke like incense. His soul dancing inside of me. Whispering.

Chapter Forty-three: FEVER

I contracted a fever from the cold windows in the computer labs. I walked out to get some air, and pick some aloe leaves from the gardens. The leaves snapped between my fingers, excreting an elastic slime. It was the slime that I wanted. I grabbed it and went to the toilets in the graduation centre. I lathered my face with the slime, and threw the thorny leaves in the bin at the corner of the toilet.

I thought of texting my brother-in-law who was married to my sister at the time and ask him for a favour. My brother-in-law, Arthur, is the only man who paid for *lobola*. He has been a good example to the family. I had asked him for a favour once before. It was about a student loan. I needed him to sign the forms on my behalf, since he was a working person. He said yes, and we tried to apply, but to no success. I thought he would bail me out this time. I texted him.

“Hi, tata ka Shalom, unjani?”

A few minutes later, “Ndiyaphila. Ndithetha nabani?”

“Uthetha noThobeka.”

No reply.

“Bhuti ndicela undincede, ndine-fever. Ndicela undithumelele imali yePanado.”

I could have asked my big sister or my mother for these, I’d already asked my friends, but I chose to ask him because I wouldn’t be caught dead begging my sister for money. I also wanted to strengthen the relationship between me and the father of my nephew. I needed a friend in him. I thought the world isn’t that terrible of a place that *all* men should not be befriended.

Three months before, I was alone in the house; this was just after my cyber boyfriend and I had gotten in a lawsuit together. My mother was visiting my big sister and Arthur at their home. My hearing senses were so heightened that I found it difficult to sleep. I called them and asked them to quickly bring my mother home because it is not safe for me to be alone in this neighbourhood. They drove back, and as they came in, I screamed at them, “You’re taking advantage of me.”

I didn’t like my brother-in-law’s advantage over things, due to the fact that he paid *lobola* and thought this made him the man of the house. Or due to the fact that he is Christian and Christianity distorts what is right from what is wrong. It sells the audacity to impose on another person’s emotional and moral compass.

This is an example of how Christianity works. It silences the voices of authenticity, and replaces them with caricatures. If my brother-in-law didn’t like me, he had the right to say so. But for him to be distant from the pain I was feeling at that moment, cut me to the core. Then what made it worse was not speaking about it. He clearly hadn’t forgotten about that night I screamed at him because he blue-ticked my messages after I told him it was me.

Chapter Forty-four: YOU ARE NOT ONE OF MY GIRLS

It had taken months for me to meet this woman. Her name was Thandi, and she had been in the military. Now she was working in the financial aid office, specializing in finding sponsors for postgraduate students who were in need. She had promised to meet me about my case, and see if she could get me off the streets. What she had heard about me from my superiors, is that I was mentally unstable. They had told her that I had locked myself in my dorm room and was refusing to see my supervisor. They wanted me to register again in another year. She wanted to find out from me what I wanted to do.

The five of us sat in her office. It was Thandi, myself, a lecturer and a financial aid officer who worked in our department, as well as my supervisor. They recounted how I had gone missing for months by first locking myself in my room and refusing to go anywhere else, and then ending up losing my accommodation. They also reported me vandalizing university property. This vandalism was me frantically applying for funding on the university's funding webpage. One of my head lecturers noticed the several scholarships I applied on, and then wrote to them saying they should ban me from their site.

The head lecturer, knowing that I had appointments at the university's counselling clinic, told my psychologist to send me to a mental institution. I refused to go, thinking how bizarre it was that a lecturer could have access to my psychological records and, furthermore, influence my psychologist's decision on my diagnosis. Thandi asked me why I had locked myself in my room. She wanted to know what was going through my head when I isolated myself.

"I was just tired," I said.

"So, if you felt too tired to attend meetings with your supervisor, don't you think you would be too tired to complete your degree?" she asked.

The room seemed like it was spinning at this point.

They are winning; I thought to myself, nothing I say now will make her believe me.

"Ms Thandi, I really want to complete my degree this year, not in another year," I said.

"Yes, but haven't you thought about going home and getting better first?" she said.

"I cannot go home," I said.

"Why not?" she said.

"Because, my mother is sick and I am unemployed," I said.

"Thobeka, do you know how dangerous it is for a young woman to live out in the streets all by herself? I can't risk you living in our labs because we are dealing with theft in the university at the moment. Criminals are infiltrating the system and stealing our computers, what if the security guards mistake you for a thief?" she said.

"I didn't know that that was going on. And I know no one who is doing that," I said.

"As I told you before, you are not the only one who has lost accommodation. There are others like you who are sleeping at the labs and at the libraries, these are my girls and I take care of them. But I believe you have not registered this year, is that correct?" she said.

"I couldn't register because of my debt. I have some debt because I didn't receive any funding last year," I said.

"Correct. But you must understand what this means for you. Unlike my girls who are in fact registered to this university, you are not my student," she said.

"I cannot help you if you are not my student. I cannot protect you when the security guards find you and throw you out into the streets. And you cannot ask me to find you a sponsor because you are not my student. Now, we must contact your mother."

"Ma'am, you cannot contact my mother she is unwell."

"Thobeka, I'm sure being home will be better than sleeping in our labs," she said.

"No, ma'am it won't be better," I said, feeling like she wasn't listening to me.

"Do you know what it feels like to be unemployed for years after you've dedicated so many years of your life to academia?" I looked straight into her eyes, I had to see if she understood what I was revealing to her.

"Do you know how many employers take advantage of us when they find out that we are overqualified for our jobs?" my adrenalin rush was rising and my voice becoming firm.

"Do you know what a struggle it is to afford getting a driver's license? Why haven't you people thought of giving students free driver's lessons?" I said.

"Thobeka," my supervisor cut in, "I know what you are talking about. I didn't get my driver's license until I had graduated from university and was a working 32 year old. While, in contrast, my white counterparts had cars at the age of 18. Is this what has been troubling you? That you can't get a job and you don't have a driver's license?"

"Yes," I said.

"You must give it time," said my supervisor.

"Yes, give it time. We all have been through it," Thandi cuts in.

"If I go back home, there is no chance of me getting out again."

"Is your mother a single mother?" asked Thandi.

"Yes."

"No wonder you're behaving like we are your parents," said Thandi, then she turned to all the women in the room except for me and said, "contact her mother."

I pushed myself back from the table with both hands, and said to them,

"Instead of making real changes, you are going to disturb my mother?"

I stood up and proclaimed,

"You are not calling my mother!"

The women stood up, looking confused. The financial aid officer shook her head as if thinking that she did not want to be involved in this mess.

“You are out of order,” said Thandi.

“This is not about my mother. You are not calling my mother,” I said.

“You have wasted my time,” said Thandi.

I stormed out of her office and waited on the trio who had remained inside. I turned around when I sensed that they were near me and then said,

“Do not give her my mother’s number. You don’t have my permission to give her my mother’s number.”

I heard Thandi calling out to the security guard on the ground floor that he should not allow me back into her office.

Chapter Forty-five: WHAT ABOUT YOUR ANCESTORS

I had lunch in one of my usual spots. It was a cheese sandwich and black coffee, my favourite. I saw my head lecturer and supervisor walking down the stairs to the cashier. They were always close to each other. They went and sat down at one of the tables, and I felt relieved that they had not seen me. Then, something came over me, a small voice said, *Be the bigger woman*.

In any case, if I hadn't gone over to them, they would have probably seen me walking out of the cafeteria. So I thought that walking over to them was my best option. I finished my sandwich and gobbled down my coffee, as they were delving into their lunches. I put a smile on my face and started walking; they noticed me as I was half way across the floor.

My head lecturer was a middle aged white man. He was also a respected psychologist who prided himself on solving cases that had to do with psychological dissociation. He could character assassinate someone if he wanted to, if he hadn't already. And part of his life he spent as a *sangoma*. I had received an email from his lawyers after my trying to book a meeting with him. He had told potential funders to block me from their webpage and coerced my psychologist to send me to a mental institution. I thought the both of us needed to have a long conversation. He didn't think this way. Instead, he told the university's lawyers that I had no right entering the university's premises anymore. The lawyers issued out a restraining order and then deactivated my student card

I greeted them and as soon as I did I began to shake. My head lecturer's blue eyes seemed to be in contempt of me. I looked at my supervisor, hoping to get some reassurance from her. Instead she looked surprised.

"Thobeka, where have you been?" she asked me.

"How are you?" I said, avoiding the question that made me feel like an irresponsible child coming from her.

"Thobeka, did you receive the email from our lawyers?" he said, "I went and opened a case against you."

"Ow yes, I wanted to talk to you about it." I said, still smiling.

"Then what are you still doing here?" he said, "Thobeka, you have been vandalizing university property. You have mentioned my name in one of your emails to the dean. Who has been telling you to do all these things?"

Silence ensued.

"Thobeka, who on earth are you listening to?" he said.

I expected for my supervisor to find an opportunity to speak her mind, but she kept quiet and seemed to be following his lead.

"Have you thought of how your actions could affect your family? What about your ancestors?" His blue eyes pierced through me as he said this, and my smile was stuck on my face.

"You have failed to manage your research project, all you can do now is go back home and re-register," he said. That word, *failed*, made me feel worse about not affording tuition and having debt.

"I have to go now, but it was nice seeing you," I said to them. I turned around and started walking thinking of how he had asked me about my ancestors.

Weeks later I found a commune that was a few blocks away from campus. I had a difficult time sleeping, and when I stayed up I'd be thinking of him. I had nightmares with him in them, and peed in my sleep.

Chapter Forty-six: THE BLANKET CAMPAIGN

During the time I had locked myself in my dorm room, I was becoming physically frail. There were scattered plastic bottles in the room that I would use as hot water bottles. I was sleeping on a hard mattress with no pillow and avoided the telephone when it would ring. I didn't have the energy to cook because all I had for food was mealie meal. I still had my laptop with me before it was stolen at one of the computer labs.

One night there was a knock on the door and when I opened it, it was my dorm mate, Sifiso, who wanted to know if I wanted to have sex. Sifiso had his blanket around his body which made him seem like he was sleep walking. I stepped back in case he would try anything, and told him no. He said, if I wanted to, he was available and then walked away like a zombie. I never trusted Sifiso after that night, and could hear him moving his chair around in his room at late hours not knowing what he is doing.

Later there was another knock on the door and this time it was an Indian man. He said he is a warden and also a social worker at the counselling office. I let him in, wondering if he noticed the japa music coming from my laptop. I gave him a chair to sit on and then he proposed that we sit outside on the balcony. I grabbed myself a chair and sat with him on the balcony. His face wore a nervous smile which made me feel awkward. He asked me if I was okay because my lecturers were saying that I haven't been attending my classes.

I said I had been feeling very tired and couldn't even go downstairs to make myself food. I only had mealie meal to eat, and had run out of sugar. I was feeling cold because I had one thin blanket. I cried telling him about how alienated I was from friends I had back home before my time at the university.

He explained to me that sometimes a human being's soul coils up within itself. And the only way we can liberate it, is if we stretch our limbs and go for a walk and try to talk to other human beings. He promised to give me some food from his kitchen, and then advised me to come see him in his office. I said that I would, and then he left. He said he recognised me from academic events and that he thought I will make it.

I reached out to everyone I thought could help me get blankets. I told my contacts that I have been struggling and the cold nights have become unbearable. As I told them this, I could feel my soul stretching outwards and liberating me from suffering in silence. I hoped that the dean would support me. I wasn't the only student who needed blankets. During my stay at the commune, a church that knew me sent me a pamphlet that talked about a blanket campaign. There was going to be a drive through campus issuing blankets to students who needed them.

Chapter Forty-seven: THE SLAYER

The uhurus will laugh. Do not follow their laughter. They will laugh at you all the way to the bank leaving you behind and alone. That laughter can wound you, so do not go near them. The uhurus gave me one year to live, predicting I would kill myself at this university. I will climb up a desk and jump off the building. They warned me against telephone calls, saying it would be the debt collectors tracking me. They were the first to hear that I was being chased out of my room.

I was home waiting for my graduation date when I caught myself laughing. There was no one there, not even them, to defend me and this made me laugh. It was the idea in my head that I could write an article saying, A GRADUATE WRITES A BOOK TO FUNDRAISE FOR HER QUALIFICATIONS that made me laugh the hardest. I had already compiled the book. The whole world would know what it's like to be a struggling person. It was hilarious how far things had gone horribly wrong.

Universities at the time were already building up campaigns about decolonizing education. They were pulling down statues of European significance, and changing European names on campus buildings. It so happens that my plan would redirect these demonstrations to a more pressing issue: money. Those who have it and those who do not. My idea was pushed by the urgency of needing to obtain my qualifications at the risk of the university disposing of them if I could not go and collect them. The university would not deliver a certificate under any circumstances. I was in deep shit.

I alerted the press of my plight, and mere hours after that a newspaper reporter contacted me and said that she will cover my story. Minutes after that phone call, another reporter called and said that she will also cover my story. So my story was covered in two different newspapers and published on the same day, differing only in the way that it was told.

Seconds after the story went, I received a call from a stranger saying he is in Kenya and has read my story and was going to give me R2000 to travel for my qualifications. Numerous other phone calls and emails saying they will pay for me to go get my qualifications and even attend my graduation, were made to me. The vice chancellor felt pressured to respond to the media saying the university will deliver my credentials to my doorstep because it recognises how its policy does not work for the poor.

I was surprised at the impact that my actions had on my predicament. The movement went from being about decolonization to being about fees. Students started chanting, "Fees must fall." They wanted to be able to write their exams and be issued their academic results without having to feel guilty about what they termed "historical debt". I marvelled at and entertained my theory that I might have sparked this revolution. After all, radio podcasts that were covering my story dubbed me the Slayer.

Chapter Forty-eight: CAUGHT

At the Hillbrow police station I spoke to a police officer, trying to convince him to take me back to the university. The police officer insisted that I let him call my mother.

“But it is important that I get back to campus,” I said.

“You will get back there, but first we must hear from your mother, and take it from there,” said the police officer.

I gave him my mother’s phone number.

“You can try her, but she is too old to be disturbed with my life,” I said.

The police officer nodded and dialled the number on his cell phone.

The previous night, before the police officers were called to take me away from the university, I was quarrelling with Katlego from the stairs of the Great Hall. Katlego’s anger flashed in a second as though he never wanted to see me ever again. His dreadlocks were spiky and a vein down his forehead protruded.

I rubbed my Hare Krishna prayer beads between my thumb and my index finger hoping this would calm him down. I chanted to Hare Krishna, took out my bells and chanted louder. Katlego ran up the stairs and straight into the security guards’ station. He reported me following him and then they asked to see my student card. I should have run away when I still had the chance.

“What happened?” asked the security manager.

“She is stalking me,” replied Katlego.

“I am not stalking him, that is not true,” I said.

“Let’s start from the beginning,” said the security manager, “do you know this girl?”

“Yes,” said Katlego.

“I am not stalking-“ I said.

“You wait your turn, miss,” said the security manager.

“We were dating,” said Katlego.

“But now you don’t want to see her anymore?” asked the security manager.

“No, I don’t,” he said.

“Okay, let’s put that in writing,” said the security manager.

She handed him a piece of paper for him to write his statement on, whilst I sat silently in a corner. He was given a chair to sit on and a separate room away from my sight. It hurt my feelings not knowing what Katlego was writing about me on that piece of paper, and so did the fact that nobody seemed to care that he was acting like a stranger towards me.

Other members of security arrived, including a paramedic. The paramedic stepped inside the interrogation room where I was still sitting, and the security manager told him to speak to me as I

was not making any sense. They told the paramedic that I was stalking Katlego, and Katlego no longer wanted to see me. Their words cut to the core of my soul.

If only they knew the depth of the story and its complexities. If only they were willing to hear my side of it. This was entirely my fault. I should never have spoken to Katlego that day – I had known that he wasn't up to speaking to anyone. I should not have followed him. The shame of sleeping in the streets must have hit him.

They sent him home, and ordered for me to be taken away to the police station in Hillbrow. I spent the night there, scared and praying. In the asylum I obsessed over calling him and talking about what happened. I wanted to know if he would wait for me to return to Johannesburg.

Chapter Forty-nine: THE BOYFRIEND WHO STALKED ME

One day it was raining words. I picked them up, and tied them into small strings. I removed the seeds of bad words from the good ones, and was left with good words to write. I took the bad words to a garden nearby and planted them there, so they would grow good.

My cyber boyfriend had nudes of me. He kept them after our break-ups, and looked at them when he got home from work. He wrote to me, saying, "I still have them." He knew he could scare me. He was a member of a secret Facebook group where men were sharing nudes of their girlfriends. He said he wouldn't share my nudes because he respected me. He refused to delete those pictures, though.

He was a late bloomer. He only started having sex when he was twenty-one years old. Then after that, he rented a lot of prostitutes to practice on. He was a short man, of which he made a joke. He also made fun of his small, uncircumcised penis and a balding head. It was the balding that really got to him.

He came across as a sensitive guy, if you didn't get too close to him. And then, he would have those angry fits where he can completely shut you off. He was my second sex-partner. I didn't know when to leave him, because I thought relationships were meant to last forever. After one of our break-ups, he returned for sex over and over again.

"I still have them," his text read.

"Please delete those, like I've asked you to too many times," I replied.

New mail from Tyler Glasper popped up in my inbox, with porn attached.

"Are you Tyler Glasper?" I texted him.

"How can I be?" he texted back.

"A Tyler Glasper has been sending porn to my email address," I texted.

"I am not Tyler Glasper," he texted, with a smiling emoticon.

Chapter Fifty: I AM IN YOUR HEAD NOW

I pressed play on the video that my cyber boyfriend sent me. It was shot in a dark room but I could recognize the background. He shot it in his living room. The book shelf on his library faced the empty black plastic chair that was in front of the camera. *One too many is not enough to forget you* was the soundtrack, as he slow danced towards the chair. And then his penis came into full view.

This was one of many videos of himself that he sent me, some with blue hue or monochrome. Those few early days of our honeymoon phase were characterized by my helping him open up. He seemed to be shy and apologetic about his sexuality but sensitive which was the thing that attracted me to him. It was as if I was with another woman, someone who could read my mind and get me, someone who was not afraid to be submissive. Maybe he had accidentally given my email address to someone. He couldn't have been the stalker because he had an alibi. I'd get the perverted emails *while* chatting to him.

His videos were not welcome anymore, but more and more of them came. He was different from who I knew him to be. He sent me an email titled, *Things that I like*. I opened the mail, and there were photographs of teenage girls revealing their naked breasts. Below were photos of all types of vulvas spread open to the camera's flashlight. A video showed him penetrating a woman. She didn't seem aware that he was recording. It made me think of the many times in bed where he had his phone camera facing me. When I asked him if he was taking pictures of me he said he was texting his dad.

I quickly closed the email and cried my trembling hands over my mouth. I felt the presence of evil engulf me. He said, "I am a sick man." I wanted to console him.

"I have dementia," he said.

"At night, Tyler Glasper possesses me then I end up doing things that I cannot remember doing."

I have long nursed his feelings until he admitted to being Tyler Glasper. He said I mustn't tell anyone. If I did, he would lose his job, his place to stay, his friends and family as no one would want to hang around a sick individual. He said he was going to end up in the streets soon and that he was slowly losing the battle with his alter ego. He had a drug addiction but I never saw him use. I only saw liquor bottles in his sink once when we were having an argument. I came over to his place unannounced because I wanted to see if he was cheating on me. He was home, and shocked to see me. He managed to kick me out then. Was it the drugs and the alcohol that gave him dementia? Did he really have dementia?

My phone rang and it was him on the other end. I heard him breathe deeply. He spoke to Tyler who wasn't there with him. He started apologizing frantically, telling me about his membership in a secret Facebook group and that he would never share pictures of me on that group. Bluntly, he said, "I want to fuck you."

I cried even harder out of heartbreak and confusion. He added that my female colleague also received porn from his Tyler Glasper account.

"Why?" I asked.

"I wanted to teach her a lesson," he said.

“That is not okay. I’m going to report you to the police,” I said.

“Please, if you tell anyone I will kill myself. I told you the truth because I respect you.”

“Stop,” I said, “you need to get help. Who are these girls in the photos?”

“You think you know everything, don’t you?” his voice changed from a matured bass to a childish tone. I could sense that he was holding back laughter.

“I am in your head now,” he said.

Chapter Fifty-one: TYLER GLASPER

I was someone's daughter who fell in love with a man and trusted him. Soon I met his dark side: and a woman that goes by the name of Stephina. Stephina's sole purpose was to deny my allegations against him. She stared at the facts with a cold heart.

"My client is innocent," she said.

"You want revenge because he broke up with you. If you were stalked, you would have blocked him, but you didn't. Instead you willingly sent my client nude pictures of yourself, trying to seduce him."

Stephina had a daughter. I know this because I had her phone number on my WhatsApp and there was a picture of herself and her daughter on her profile. I don't know how she could live with herself after stopping the case from going to court, and issuing a restraining order against me since he claimed that *I* was stalking *him*. But that wasn't entirely false, I guess

I went through his social media accounts and inbox-ed his friends. I told them that their friend was capable of keeping porn of underage girls and when he found out, he called my mother to say that I was sabotaging his career. When I contacted his sister to tell her that her brother was dangerous, she didn't know me so she didn't care.

I soon believed it when he said that he was in my head and I was afraid that I would never be able to evade him. Every song that I listened to brought me close to memories and feelings that I did not want to relive. My impulses were still reacting to the day I saw those girls. I was caught up in trying to have him exposed. I thought if I exposed him he would change back into the man that I knew. Instead, he showed no remorse. He knew that his friends would defend him and his family wouldn't care. His secret weapon was Stephina, a woman who could scare his victims into keeping quiet.

My friend, Sven, sat across from me on a coffee table and asked me if I was dating this guy. I told him it was complicated. He said that if I blocked Stephina and this guy, he would help me to see a psychologist. This was a fight for my life. What I thought was real, was toppled over with lies, and my truth was caught at the bottom of the sea where no one could hear me and no one could see the ghastly shapes of my cyber boyfriend and Stephina who were out to get me.

PART THREE: RELEASE

Chapter Fifty-two: RELEASE DATE

The chaos was coming to an end. All the gossip they were spewing about me was going to come to an end. I was going to re-join them. They had to decide how we were all going to move forward. It wasn't going to be my choice because I was medicated. I was there in need of protection from myself. Control had to be on their terms.

The last person I had seen on the day I was admitted to the mental institution, was the person who was assigned to come pick me up: my big sister. She took time off work and couldn't leave her kid so she brought him with her. She also brought with her some cereal and milk for Wildcat because she knew how much Wildcat loved eating my food.

"I'm here to pick you up," she said, smiling at me as if looking for approval.

I didn't give her the satisfaction. I was happy to be leaving but was equally unimpressed by how she had treated me. It felt to me like she wasn't smiling because she was genuinely nervous but smiling because she was pleased at the amount of power she had over my life.

We got my pills from the nurses in the nurse's station and I changed into my old clothes. Everyone was smiling to see me in my old clothes because they only knew me in my patient's tunic. We walked to the outside of the ward and for the first time I realised just how far we were from civilization. It was a desert out there and just us in the middle of it. Whoever wanted us to come there never wanted us to be heard from again.

We drove for one hour to reach East London, and made a stop at the shopping mall where my big sister works. The two employees that I had last seen on the day that I was admitted, were there smiling at me.

"We missed you," they said.

And I wondered how total strangers can think they miss me when they don't even know me? But they had to be nice to the sick person, lest she acts out again. We spent another hour heading for Port Elizabeth when the car broke down. The child was upset because this meant that his mother and himself would have to turn back to East London. I could travel on my own as long as I had my medication with me.

"I can't believe this bullshit," I said, "it's because of those witches from your workplace."

"Are we back there again?" she asked.

I fell silent because this meant she could turn the car back and send me back to the mental institution, if I showed any antagonism towards her friends. Being healed meant liking her friends.

Eventually, a driver came by and stopped his car for us. He offered to take our stuff granted only *one* passenger could come with him to Port Elizabeth. I hopped in his car, and left my sister with her son by the side of the road. I knew this stranger from high school, I was his senior but he did not recognize me. Seeing him again made me think of how weird life is. How you can grow up full of potential teaching all these new things called science and mathematics only to end up counting coins from people you pick up at the side of the road.

I made it to my mother's front gate and she was already standing on the doorpost with her cell phone in her hand. She was speaking to my big sister on the other end.

“Yes, she’s here,” I could hear her saying.

The house was clean and shiny and the television set was removed where a new one was going to replace it. We offloaded the bags and the new TV set into the house and the driver drove away. My mother was happy that I was home and even happier that I arrived just in time for Christmas. I was happy to be home too, to see home through different eyes. It was a miracle that I made it out of the mental institution and was not transferred to eBhofolo.

I have not been at home since I had been to Johannesburg. My clothes did not fit anymore because I had gained weight. Perhaps it was my medication; it had finally given my body permission to expand. My neighbours were noticing the weight gain, they seemed to love it. They spoke about marriage arrangements now that I had grown into a wonderful woman.

They didn’t know where I had been, it was a family secret. But they assumed that wherever I was, I was happy. Wildcat called me and told me that she had been let out and that she was living with her mother and her daughter now. She was still consulting people with ailments and hoping to pursue studies in fashion. We promised to meet each other for lunch. We never did.

Chapter Fifty-three: SEEING UKHO AGAIN

The first time Ukho's mother saw me after my return from the asylum, she frowned. She observed that I was shaking and asked if my medication was the reason. She asked me if I was taking regular baths and if I was washing the dishes and sweeping the floor. And then without waiting for a response she ordered me to do these things in order to keep healthy.

Ukho's mother never called or visited me in the asylum. She didn't give me reasons why not either. I was just supposed to accept that she didn't do these things then but that she was there now. I found out later that other things happened while I was gone. That they had lost yet another house and have had to live with our mother for a few months. During which they abused my mother by not cooking or serving her food, and spewing insults at her.

My mother alerted the authorities and had them leave her house, at which point they vowed to never let her see her grandchildren again. While Ukho's mother was visiting me at our mother's house, they were living right around the block and we didn't know this until a neighbour told us. Soon after the neighbour had told us, we saw Ukho coming home back from school.

There is so much I wish I could have said to Ukho, so much time had been wasted. She was already grown now, with her own mind and her own emotions. I could only hope that she was in full control of her memories as well. I would like her to remember that it would not have been my choice to not see or talk to her for years and years. If she knew that, it would make things a lot easier.

She was taller with wider hips. She stood with self-awareness. Like a broken record, I asked her about school. And like a broken record, she said everything was fine. I wondered how much about my absence did her parents tell her. I gave her a hug and a kiss and let her go.

Chapter Fifty-four: MAKAZI'S PHONE CALL

Ever since my release, my close relatives kept calling my mother to see how we were doing. My great aunt was one of these relatives, and she would call us in the late hours of the night. I asked her to stop calling at night. She said she wanted to talk to me.

"How are you now?" she asked me.

"Ndiyaphila akhonto makazi, how are you?" I retorted.

"Ndiyaphila nam," she said.

The conversation turned into her talking about how she believed that God was a woman and how her new boyfriend thinks she is a goddess. I was happy to hear that my aunt was happy in her romantic relationship. Even at her age, she was longing to find someone who would make her feel good about herself. It was frustrating, though, to listen to her go on about gods and goddesses when I knew a hefty load about them. It made me feel further estranged from my family when the older people thought they know more than the younger generation does.

"I hear that your diagnosis was bipolar," she said.

"Yes," I said.

"Do you know what it means?" she asked.

"Yes," I said, hesitantly.

I didn't want to be on the call for too long, lest I would have to endure a lecture from my aunt. She told me that she also had bipolar and wanted to know if I also can't switch off my mind. I told her that this happened to me when I was little, the not being able to switch off your mind. She said that is what it is and that I have to stick to my dosage. Above all else she wanted me to pay her a visit so that she could prove to me that all I have been through was minor.

Chapter Fifty-five: THE FANTASTIC FOUR

I went from feeling lonely to having business partners I could hang out with. We were about the same age and I was the only female. One of these dudes was my boyfriend whom I knew since high school. The other two were friends of ours. They organized *Elements of Hip-hop* and *Clash of the Titans* but that doesn't mean they liked the officials. We watched movies a lot and talked about directors we liked.

No more hoodies out in beer caves on cold winter days. No more bouncing our step when walking up the hills of central city: Port Elizabeth. The four of us alight from a taxi listening to *Erykah Badu* or *The Fugees*. I threw all of this away when I left for Johannesburg. I couldn't grow up to be the white and rich princess that I so badly wanted to be, but being the queen of the hip-hop nights was close to acquiring that dream. I brought my camera with me and recorded everything with my boyfriend. We fought a lot about footage towards the end of our relationship.

We were now married, in a way, each to his own poison. Me and my writing; them and their wives and children. We don't talk about the past as if we would rather forget it existed. What was so terrible it couldn't be talked about? Did I threaten someone they loved? Or was our world a fantasy?

Chapter Fifty-six: A LETTER FROM THE INSIDE

Dear Thobeka

I am sorry that you have been diagnosed with Bipolar. But it should be soothing to you to know what has been bothering you all these years. You are 32, and are probably thinking about furthering your education, getting a stable job, getting married and having a baby. But your reality is that, you are probably not fit to continue with your education or to be in a workplace. (Also judging from your past feelings of fatigue towards the end of your Honour's degree, and how you have had bad experiences in the workplace such as sexual harassment and bad clashes with your boss.) Considering this, I advise that you stay at home and apply for a disability grant that you can receive from the government, granted that you can prove that you are taking medication for your mental illness. I want you to know that I will be taking away from you your ability to choose a suitable husband because you will be unable to make good judgments for yourself, and you will more often than not, attempt self-destructive acts and take on toxic roles in your romantic relationships. You will be too attached and too delusional to know when to break up with someone. You will be depressed because you would have liked to be with that person for the rest of your life, but your juvenile desires will not be met. Your medication will be bad for you when you are pregnant, but without your medication you will be hazardous towards your own offspring, so maybe the idea of having children is not for you. Get used to the loneliness and the feelings of being trapped now, because they might last you several years. While there is no definite proof from your family that you are indeed sick, you probably know deep down inside that something is amiss with you. You have been the centre of your family's confusion and conflict. You are misunderstood and judged. You are alienated from your mother and sisters. You never had a dad or any relationship with your dad's family, only myths you have created out of your own mind. You are delusional, thinking for one minute that you are not sick, that you shouldn't be taking your meds, and that you are close to the universe which explains your lamentations. But in reality you may not be the wise person that you think you are, you are not a sage, instead you are helpless. Sometimes you may think that you are a victim of the bad things that happen to you, and that nothing else exists, no God no law no parents, but this is just the downside to my upside.

In 2021 you are turning 33, and you think you have escaped me. You think this because you can manage to not speak to your mother and sisters for long periods of time and you are geographically away from them. But, still you have been unable to secure a non-toxic relationship with your ex-boyfriend. You are still unmarried. You are still not completely sure if you will ever have a stable job and live out on your own. You do not know where you will end up, then you divert your mind from these thoughts because you think by avoiding them you would escape me. You do not know how to live if you do not have all the answers. All you must know is that you must take your meds. I can't guarantee you that the doctors will put you off medication; I don't know how long you must put up with it. I don't know if you will ever know, just like I don't know if there's enough proof that you really are Bipolar. Aside from that, it seems like I am the only friend that has stuck by you since the very beginning. You have been doing this on your own for too long that you do not know how to be with others, or pray with others; you pray alone, that is how you like it. You do not like trying to convince a second person, or worse, to teach them something new. If they do not get it yet, it is too late for them. That is why you do not like communicating with your family, you do not like sharing your ideas with other people or sitting and listening to them speak to you about their problems. At

this stage, it seems like people who want to get close to you can't stop complaining. You do not want to share a room with your mother unless you are utterly unable to control it. You have watched the years go by in the same childhood bedroom, the same hallway that leads to your mother's bedroom. You have memories of her screaming at the debt lawyers over the phone, and heard her when she was sick, which was all the time. Your mother has aged in front of you, in the same house as you, and that is just depressing. Good luck with your escape mission.

Warm regards,

Bipolar

EPILOGUE

Asanda stood against the metal bars of the asylum's fence. She admired me as she watched me and my nephew. We were waiting for my big sister to finish talking to the nurses inside. They were probably talking about God and His mercy on His servants. She was probably telling them how grateful she was to God for sending me there. It was my first time seeing Asanda smile. Ever since her face was cut, she had nothing to smile about.

"Ngumtshana wakho lo tshoma'am?" she asked me.

"Ewe," I said, feeling the tension between us.

I was free and she wasn't. I had a family and she didn't. I reached into my pocket and found ten rand. I remembered that we were allowed to buy food or cigarettes for ourselves when we got bored. I handed it over to her.

"Here, you're going to need this," I said.

She smiled at me, maybe a bit frantically. A ten rand note was a lot. She could get vetkoeks with her fish, or ginger beer with her cigarettes.

"Ungandilibali ke tshomam," she said to me.

"No I won't," I said to her.

Her voice was like a child's voice. Or a woman frozen in a time when she was crying for help. It said she was a good person totally stripped of all options. All was draped in darkness for her now. In the mental institution we were different. Some of us were wailers some of us stared into blank space. What if death was another patient? When she looked at me she could believe in the light. I had a second chance and she didn't.

Part B: Portfolio

Portfolio

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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of

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by

Thobeka Kenene

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Introduction

My portfolio will reflect my overall reading research I have done this year as well as my own process of articulating what I have come to understand as a writer. My portfolio will consist of a compilation of my Reflective Journals; my poetics assignment; my reader's report, and my COIL report. Coil is writing in community project that gives the MACW students the opportunity to teach or share their knowledge with the literary community. More on Coil will be available on my reflection on the experience in the report and in my RJ's. Lastly, my four book reviews will be discussed.

I will edit my RJ's in a weekly sequence that can show my reader the growth of my reading and writing research. I chose to cut some out because they had irrelevant inform in relation to my reading and writing experience in the MACW course. I included those that I think clearly show my development as a reader and writer.

Collection of Reflective Journals

Week 6 RJ

Monday's seminar taught us about punctuation and the politics of punctuation. We read from a few readings that we were given and were asked to give feedback on how punctuation on those texts have been used.

On Tuesday I was munching on piece of bread trying to listen to my thoughts but nothing came. I missed breakfast and lunch and had a supper to look forward to at the dining hall. I thought of how literature helps us live with the fragments of ourselves from the past.

I didn't do great for last week's reflective journal. I fear that I may do badly for this one. Something warns me of a writer's block. The trauma was finding out that my way of writing was popular culture. It was mediocre. Which begged the question, who were my readers then?

Week 7 RJ

This week we started off with Mxolisi Nyezwa's (course teacher and poet) seminar. I learned about language as concrete, and language as musical and poetic. We had to read close to six books for our reading group session on Tuesday. We also had an assignment to write three pieces about meeting poetry. On Friday we met up again and read our assignments to one another.

Week 8 RJ

For Monday's seminar we had to read Jorge Luis Borges' *The Library of Babel*. This was not an easy read for me as it was fully detailed with words that one would have to look up in the dictionary. The reading confused me: at some points I did not know what the writer was talking about in other points. It was chaos. And yet I had to find inspiration from this reading in order to come up with my own piece of writing for the week's assignment.

On Monday I did not hear a thing of what Nathan Trantraal (course teacher and poet) was saying. I think there might be something wrong with his microphone. But everybody else seemed to not struggle hearing him. All I heard was that we should not reserve our prejudice when reading a book – we should read with open minds. That Monday was not looking good for me but I was hoping to make the best of it by writing what I could write and pour all my energy into it without concerning myself about *The Library of Babel*.

Week 9 RJ

This Monday we had a seminar on conventional versus strange fiction. We spoke about how conventional fiction has a hero that gets a calling to a mission and the obstacles that the hero faces in achieving his or her goal. We talked about the mentor figure that becomes introduced to the hero urging him to take on the calling. We agreed that this is the universal way of storytelling.

We spoke about the strange way of storytelling and that it could be ramblings of the writer or character. The assignment was to write one story in both styles, one in a conventional style and the other in the strange style. I wrote about uGquma and the Trade, a story about a young man who is called into the past to stop a future war from coming. UGquma works for the Trade and lives alone in Bantu City. He is similar to Nobenguni.

I'm building something, from a story about Nobenguni who lives in Bantu City and I want to turn it into a longer prose or a book. Nobenguni features in the first conventional part of the assignment but does not feature in the second strange part of it. She features as a journalist who goes off to meet with a 'skipper' for an interview. It explains in the story that 'skippers' are those who have escaped the Trade and live in Bantu City as rebels.

Paul Mason (course teacher and academic) noticed that I used Gquma the sunburnt queen's name to name my character and he wondered if I knew that and if I did it on purpose. I replied: yes, I knew that. Gquma is the name of the sunburnt queen written about in a book

titled *The Sunburnt Queen* by Hazel Crampton, a historian. In reality uGquma is a female and lived a hundred years ago whereas in my fiction uGquma is a male. I wanted to know if it was okay to use the name for my character, however never asked Paul.

Sibongakonke (my classmate) said I should try living in the world of Bantu City more, and try to describe that world. She said that she wants to see it. Xolani (another classmate) agreed with Sibongakonke saying I should keep the rhythm of the story going. He liked the part where Gquma says, "You ask I walk backwards. Put one step towards my stumbling down a quick sand of your blood spent in time. A time locked in a clock ticking one dawn to the next of me waking to these texts of this tongue twisting that bent waves and stole continents and bought the brilliance you ask of me now." I agree that that is where I sound more rhythmic and in touch with the story. Perhaps I should try writing from Gquma's voice more.

Week 10 RJ

On Monday we did a seminar on desire. Mishka Hoosen (course teacher and writer) made us listen to a song called *Cherry Wine* by Hozier. We all agreed that the song was a romantic song about a toxic relationship. The lyrics of the song were haunting and the singer sounded devoted to his subject of topic. It sounded as if the singer was pouring out his soul for his desired interest. We then read Anne Carson's *On Desire*. Anne spoke about soul mates and how they have existed since the times of the classical Greeks.

Mishka also read us the *Confessions of the Fox* by Jordy Rosenberg that had language we could not understand. Mishka had to translate to us what certain terms meant in context to the story.

I don't understand what happened between me and my teacher Mishka this week. She gave us an assignment to write about an instant in our lives where we have felt desire and I did that. I submitted my assignment the following Tuesday and she rejected it. It was not the

freewriting piece that I had written in class, so I understood and reworked it. I submitted the freewriting piece that has been reworked and still she rejected my assignment saying it is unacceptable.

Week 11 RJ

This Monday we didn't have any seminar because our teacher for that seminar was having a family crisis. We carried on with our readings on Tuesday morning. My selected reading was Barry Hannah's *Water Liars*, a strange reading because it was about people who lie. Xolani seemed to think I should have read the piece with more passion. The rest of my classmates didn't get what the story was about. I told Paul Wessels (course coordinator and writer) that I liked it because it had a twofold meaning to it. On the one hand the writer is talking about his wife, on the other hand he is talking about the liars down the pier.

On the one hand the writer is troubled by thoughts about his wife and decides to go by the pier. On the other hand, while at the pier he meets liars who tell stories all day including stories that remind him of his pain about his wife. In this way the writer describes to us his inner feelings as well as his outside world.

We didn't have an assignment this week so I have had time to read *Blindness* by Jose Saramago. I noticed there that Saramago does not use quotation marks to paraphrase what his characters are saying. His sentences and his character's dialogue blend into one another. This does not make it easy to follow what Saramago is saying in his book, because it is a strange style.

I like how Saramago weaves the story slowly in. Especially with the culprit who stole the car when he goes blind. It happens so unexpectedly. Then when the doctor turns blind too, it is unexpected. I like how, when he introduces his characters, he links them up with social issues like he did with the prostitute or his introduction of the thief before it went blind.

When he speaks of the thief, matters arise such as moral responsibility and trust. He is trying to show how deeply the blind man has been betrayed by the thief for stealing his car. And how we as the readers have been betrayed too because this was not a good Samaritan as he posed himself to be.

When he brings up the prostitute, he first explains to us how she is a prostitute. That she chooses when she wants to meet her men and who she wants to meet. He speaks about what constitutes a prostitute and what doesn't. And he suggests to us that we might consider her a prostitute for a lack of a better word.

I liked *Redemption in Indigo* by Karen Lord for its way of using magic realism. The appearance of talking spiders sends a message to the reader that this is a fairy tale. But so carefully weaved with realism the fairy tale becomes believable that spiders can talk to people. The story has humour in it especially with Paama's unwanted visit from her husband.

It is the humour in Karen Lord's story that separates it from being just an adult fairy tale like Sheila Heti's stories. The humour makes Karen Lord's story sound like African literature the characters that are being made fun of and the characteristics they have that are regarded as funny by the African reader.

My favourite story in Sheila Heti's *The Middle Stories* is *The Woman Who Lived in a Shoe* because I relate to it. I relate to being a woman who is alone in the world, and this woman is alone in the world. She chooses to not partake in parties, she says no to proposals of men who adore her because she cannot leave her house or shoe. It sounds familiar to me because I have parts of my life that I am unwilling to leave behind for somebody else.

Eventually the woman leaves her shoe behind, leaving the men in her life behind. I like how Sheila says that the woman walked and walked and walked and walked. It makes that piece playful to read. It is in this point of the story where the woman evolves and moves on from the shoe.

I've written something else, it's called *Raised by Men* and it goes:

When I spent the night at the psychiatric ward I was among men. They were sent in by police officers and arrested for drug abuse. They were at their uttermost despair, praying, moaning, gnashing their teeth, tied up and fighting to be freed. There were no blankets left except for one. So they shared it with me.

As I slept peacefully in my blanket, I felt safe. Like, even though these men were outcasts to society they were still men. And no matter what harm came into that ward they would be the first to defend me.

Because they didn't have a blanket and I did, so at all times men look after women in their silent way.

I wrote this piece from the heart and it speaks to how men are often misunderstood and how they can redeem themselves through small acts of kindness. This piece could be the beginning of a larger project if I collect enough tools from the books I have been reading.

I could borrow from Saramago his way of introducing his characters into the scene. I could have animals talking to human beings like with Karen Lord. Or I could be a trickster like Sheila Heti in her short stories. Or I could borrow from Barry Hannah how he expresses the inner world and juxtaposes it with the outer world.

This week I will be reading *Use This Word in a Sentence* by Ann Lauterbach an article that sounds like a book review. It sounds like the writer has done a lot of research before writing this article, especially when she starts talking about the American Puritan Jeremiad. She has a way of talking about experiment and proving her point that is not forceful. And she has a way of showing the reader rather than telling.

Week 12 RJ

On Monday we read *Use This Word in a Sentence: "Experimental"* by Ann Lauterbach. And I felt that Ann's piece was very well researched. She speaks about the American Puritan

Jeremiad and their agenda for crisis in society. She also speaks about the death of her sister to further explain this word experimental.

We also read Amina Cain's *Slowness*; Kate Bernheimer's *Fairy Tale is Form, Form is Fairy Tale*; Barbara Guest's *The Beautiful Voyage*; Craig Santos Perez's *Unincorporated poetic territories*; Chris Kraus's *Hunger-Technology-Emotion*; Dambudzo Marechera's *Beneath reality there is always fantasy*, and Raymond Federman's *Surfiction: A Postmodern Position*.

In Amina Cain's *Slowness* what stood out for me was her saying that "your body is in the film, or it is in the book," when in the space of watching a film or reading a book. She also says that her "imagination gets everything, and it determines everything too: form, language, narrative voice, character, setting, and so on." I think that is a good virtue in writing for one's imagination to grasp everything and determine everything.

In Kate Bernheimer's piece what stood out for me is when she says that "fairy tales magnetize writers who identify themselves as realists, along with surrealists and Dadaists and modernists and existentialists and science fictionists and fabulists (not to mention romance novelists and greeting card authors and tabloid headline writers)." That part for me seems to me that fairy tales are for everybody.

Kate also focuses on four elements of traditional fairy tales. These are namely flatness, abstraction, intuitive logic, and normalized magic. She begins by stating that in flatness it is the characters that are flat. Characters in fairy tales are flat. They are not given many emotions.

Secondly she mentions abstraction and says that fairy tales rely on abstraction, as not many illustrative details are given in a fairy tale. She moves on to intuitive logic, as in fairy tales we are told that this happened and then that happened without an explanation of why. And lastly she explains normalized magic whereby in fairy tales the natural world is a magical world.

Barbara Guest's *The Beautiful Voyage* taught me about poetry. He taught me that poetry is a journey to take; a voyage into the unknown.

Craig Santos Perez's *Unincorporated poetic territories* taught me about the difference between American literature and Guam literature and how colonialism works in other countries.

In Chris Kraus's *Hunger-Technology-Emotion* I am not sure what the writer was trying to say. I learned about her anorexia and her relationship with an Alien. But I am not sure what kind of an Alien is this. Is it the kind we see in science fiction or is it just a word she uses to describe a foreigner.

In Dambudzo Marechera's *Beneath reality there is always fantasy* what stood out for me is that there is always fantasy beneath reality and it is the writer's job to reveal it.

On Tuesday we read Brian Evenson's *The Crazy Party Guy, or, a Disruption of Smooth Surfaces*. He talks about the avant-garde and compares it to a drunk crazy party guy. I think that is a brilliant example to explain the avant-garde and its way of disrupting the status quo of society.

We also read Mxolisi Nyezwa's *I heard rhythms*; R.M. Berry's *Writing the Present*; Jackie Wang's *Aliens*; Tamiko Beyer's *A slanty kind of racialized poetics*; Tim Seibles's *Desperate and Beautiful Noise*; Charles Olson's *Projective Verse*; Anna Kavan's *On realism*, and Kathy Acker's *The killers*.

On Wednesday we read both Linh Dinh's *What I Usually Say to My Students* and Lara Glenum's *Language Is the Site of Our Collective Infection*. I thought Linh Dinh's piece was talking to me about poetry and what poetry is. Her piece was a learning process to read. Also Lara's piece offered lessons on what poetry is and what it should not be.

We also read Njabulo Ndebele's *Rediscovery of the Ordinary*; Taiye Selasi's *Stop pigeonholing African writers*; Camille Roy's *Experimentalism*; Marina Tsvetaeva's *Condition of Creation*; Velimir Khlebnikov's *On poetry*; Tiff Holland's *How Subject Dictates Narrative Form*, and Brian Evenson's *Afterword to Altman's Tongue*.

On Thursday we read *Someone is Writing a Poem* by Adrienne Rich. What stood out for me in this reading is when he introduced Lynn Emanuel as the writer of the poem *The Planet Krypton*. I think the poem was very well detailed and gave the imagery of a bomb very well.

We also read Federico Garcia Lorca's *Theory and function of the duende*; George Quasha's *Axial Drawing*; Antonio Machado's *Notes on poetry*; Bell Hooks's *Narratives of Struggle*; William Carlos Williams's *The Practice*, and Phillip Zhuwao's *Interview by Alan Finlay*.

On Friday we read Aime Cesaire's *Poetry and Knowledge*. What stood out for me in this reading is the author's vast knowledge of science and how science has affected society.

We also read Raymond Federman's *A voice Within a Voice*; Robert Creeley's *A Sense of Measure*; Lesego Rampolokeng/Ike Muila's *Interview*; Christina Rivera Garza's *The unusual*; Anton Shammas's *untitled address*; Bettina Judd's *Writing about race*, and Vicente Huidobro's *Creationism*.

It was hard doing my assignment but I took it one day at a time. I read each article thoroughly and began to reflect on each one thoroughly. I would take small breaks in between then come back to finish it. I couldn't get five thousand words at first, but Paul gave me guidance.

I have been also going through a lot of strain personally and would have to go see a psychologist about it. But I am happy to say that I have been able to reach five thousand and eight words in my assignment. Things worked out fine.

I learned a lot about life and how expensive it is becoming. I learned about writers and how they saw life. I learned how to write again. I learned how to write an essay by having a story to show and tell.

The Body in Language, an anthology edited by Edwin Torres was such an amazing read. I was taken aback by the index page that had the four elements written on it. There must have been some psychology behind it. I ended up asking my psychology student friend what it all must have meant.

She too had no idea because they did not have this type of information at their department. When I opened the book I literally said wow. She also said wow when I showed her the index page. That earth is emotion, fire is creation, water is thinking, and air is foundation.

Week 15 RJ

Our class with Chwayita Ngamlana (course teacher and writer) on Monday was nice. We spoke about writing sex scenes and how that would play out in our assignments. Chwayita gave us five writing styles to take from while we write our assignments. She said these were the five ways of introducing a sex scene. The first way is the use of metaphorical innuendos. The second way is the blunt way. The third way is the reflective way where for example an adolescent would write in a diary. The fourth way is violent sex. The fifth way is an unexpected sex scene.

Week 16 RJ

On Monday Carol Leff (course teacher and academic) gave us an assignment that we had to write about someone we know who had died or about a separation or end of a relationship. We watched Zakes Mda on YouTube talking about his book *Ways of Dying* and how he developed his stories for the book. In the video he said that he used stories of people that he knew family members, and even stories from ordinary news. I thought and told the class that Zakes Mda achieved what he achieved so we can learn from it and surpass it.

Week 17 RJ

I wrote about the waskom. It is something sentimental to me. The waskom reflects my childhood and my community back from the township where I come from. I wanted to tell the story of my people, the story of poverty. I wanted to show how the waskom is used and how often it is used by whom.

I was inspired by stories such as *The Bath* by Wamuwi Mbao, stories that focus on one item or event in order to tell the entire story. Through Mbao's bath, I could see the girlfriend who has passed away through the character's memories. *The Bath* is a sweet story about a lover mourning her girlfriend.

I was also inspired by Ayanda Billie's *Primus Stove* which is a poem about a character's memories of a time in their life where they used a primus stove. I found the poem very touching that it inspired me to write about the waskom. I felt like I could relate to the poem because at home we also used the primus stove before we could afford a real stove.

Week 18 RJ

I enjoyed this week's seminar and assignment. When I heard that we were going to do ranting, I got excited. I guess it's because ranting is something that happens unconsciously. Paul Mason gave us a few minutes to think about what we were going to rant about and I chose the public figure Credo Mutwa, inspired by a rant that was about Goethe the German poet.

In the assignment I was going to attack Credo Mutwa's writing because I highly believe that Credo should have found somebody else to write for him. His work, to me, failed to meet literary requirements that would help us appreciate. It felt like a struggle reading one of his books titled, *Indaba My Children*.

Week 19 RJ

I wrote the poem below for my COIL in Community project assignment. The theme was silence. We had to show silence through our poems and short stories. I was inspired by an emotional ordeal that I am going through. So, I thought to myself, if I have said that sadness gives me the voice to write down a poem, then so be it. Sadness is my muse. I have said this in my poetics assignment.

The Child of the Soul

When you are a child of abuse your soul wanders everywhere
It cannot hide from the forests
Of its dark memories
It finds the world a place full of thorns
And finds itself an orphan with no guide
It threads along the pages of disguise
And puts a smile upon the faces of its victims
It teaches one to trust
And let go of all defences
It lives among succulents
And waters its medicine
It is alluring to the unseeing eye
It tolerates those around it
Until the build-up of malice
It travels in books of sages
It is taken on record
It performs on stages
Of development

The wandering soul has moments of madness

A little hell on earth
A judgment of fire
That devours from within the forest
A light that ignites
The deepest of scars
It is blackness that defines these things
That sets us up for failure
No matter how hard we can try to escape
Blackness will forever be calling
Us closer to our poverty
Our lacking and wanting

Some of us would avoid such moments
And plunge themselves into oblivion
But they too would be haunted
By the cries of our mothers
Alas, they will not know the rewards that come with perseverance
In the end, they will not see the pearly gates
But mirages in the horizon
The sun will not rise for them
They will be blindly affiliated with the spirit of Godot
And lay waiting for the Promised Land

Some of us will be like prodigal sons
For silence is like prayer
The falling down of feathers on the floor
The flickering of candle light
We will return with hope and forgiveness in our chests
The same chests that have felt tears
And we will make anew
With singing and dancing

With clapping and chanting

With kissing and sexing

We will return to procreate a dream

That the thorns will no longer be there

But silver linings

Week 20 RJ

The COIL programme is such an amazing experience. We got to meet and teach second year New York students (over Zoom). I felt like a goddess giving wisdom to the young minds. I felt ecstatic. The week was a bit intimidating because we no longer had Sanele (Teamhw) Mhlongo (a classmate) with us. So I and Xolani Mahe had to hold it together with the exclusion of Sanele (Teamhw) Mhlongo's part.

Week 22 RJ

It was almost prophetic, the way I came across Unathi Slasha's *Jah Hills*. I became absorbed in the book, titillated at every twist and turn of the tale. I felt blessed when bhuti Mangaliso Buzani (course teacher and poet) said he was going to lend me the book. I had been long waiting to read it.

Week 23 RJ

Monday's seminar was a bit difficult for me. I enjoyed the music that was playing in between the sessions, but the topic did not titillate me. Our lecturer wanted us to write about a place. To describe a space. I felt that I was incapable of doing that, because I have a weakness in giving too much detail.

It is like when I was a little girl, and used to draw, I could not draw the hands. So, what I would do is, I would draw the people with their hands in their pockets. All of the people I drew had their hands inside their pockets, and smiling. This is how I planned to get rid of the problem of being unable to draw hands.

Week 24 RJ

I feel disappointed about my literature review assignment, especially because I had faith in it. I thought that I said everything that I needed to say with efficacy. But apparently it was not what my lecturer was looking for. In his feedback to me, Paul Wessels says that “whether [I] agreed with what was being written or not is not relevant.”

Week 25 RJ

I’m excited about this week because I got to begin my thesis abstract and novel. I am working with Henali Kuit (course teacher, writer and my supervisor), and she sent me books. One by Susanna Kaysen and the other by Mangaliso Buzani. I felt psyched when I saw Mangaliso Buzani’s name because I didn’t expect that I would be reading a book by my lecturer for my thesis. It was a pleasant surprise.

Week 26 RJ

Last Monday, we had a seminar with Henali on confidence and boldness as a means to not overwrite. In her seminar I learned how K-Ming Chang’s work does not explain her language to her readers, and how that is a form of not overwriting, because sometimes over-explaining phrases or inside jokes can take away the intensity of one’s piece. I learned how Jo Gatford and Sam Pink’s work exclude essential elements of what makes a story such as, plot, character-development, climax, etc.

Week 27 RJ

On Monday we had Jo-Ann Bekker's (course teacher and writer) seminar on fragments. We read a few examples and were given an assignment to write fragments of our own. I learned that some fragments have themes that string them together. Some writers use dates to refer to their memories. Some writers use colour spectrums as prompts for their fragments. When I started writing my fragments I thought of my thesis and how these fragments would fit into what my thesis is about.

Week 28 RJ

When I first registered to this course, my plan was to tell the story of my hood like the anti-apartheid writers of the 1970's. When I read their work I thought they write in a realistic way without any fancy language. I felt I was losing or I had lost my ability to write in fancy language such as metaphors and I thought adopting their style of realism would be the solution.

Week 29 RJ

One of my favourite books that have been transformational in my life is Maxine Hong's *The Woman Warrior*. Her novel is categorised as world literature so this was my first introduction to a memoir written by a Chinese woman. I liked how she used magic-realism, and how her chapters contained a story that could be read independent of the entire book.

Although Maxine and I are from different cultures, I found myself relating to her relationship with her mother, her estrangement to her culture, and her perception of her estranged aunt and the role of patriarchy in her community. I think I achieve to reveal the relationship with my mother, my estrangement to my culture, and my perception of the women in my life and the role of patriarchy in my creative memoir, with my thesis being how these factors affect / affected my mental health.

Week 30 RJ

I wrote a prologue for my thesis-novella because I felt that I needed to include the esoteric side to the events that transpired in my protagonist's life. In order to understand the subject I was going to delve into I did my research into New Age science. I picked up the bread crumbs I had left myself along the years. I grew to understand what spirit guides are and how they work, in order to observe how they may appear into my protagonist's life and for what significance.

I also wanted to be able to share her dreamscape with my readers. To be unapologetic and non-judgemental towards what she saw and who she was in the dreams. I believed and still believe that the dreams are speaking strongly to who she was going to be and in what world she was going to become that.

To be educated and black was going to be the issue amongst her own black people and her white counterparts. She wasn't going to fit in. And if she did fall in love with a white woman in her past life, then she might have felt afraid. Her fear due to this issue of not fitting in as a black educated person in a racist world.

I thought that my supervisor would have an issue with me saying 'gentleman' instead of just 'men' as she had been before. But I stressed the issue in the novel because it was relevant to me. We harbour cultural respect for animals in our community and so we refer to them as something of high priority. Our spirit guides would be gentlemen because also our ancestors are worshipped with a patriarchal undertone.

That is why men like my character's niece Ukho's father would believe that only men can inherit their father's wealth and not women because of his patriarchal background to perceiving ancestry. It is also the reason why women who host ancestors are considered undesirable because they are possessed by male energy. This topic raises a question as to

the validity of events in my protagonist's life being the intervention of spirit guides versus them occurring as sheer bad luck.

However, I'm not trying to advocate for the change of the world in a sense that we start seeing mentally ill patients as shamans. I think as far as mental illness goes, we need to keep our feet on the ground and face logic. A patient needs to be encouraged to take his or her pills because they will make him or her feel better. It is dangerous to rely on spiritual belief of any kind, not just Christian fundamentalism.

My supervisor said that I contrast two opposing ideas in order to bring out dark humour out of a situation. She says my protagonist does not show her feelings of despair in the story; she does not beg or complain. I think these are my strong points. I think the more I show irony in the text the more each message will be pointed out.

I included the chapter on eBhofolo because it was mentioned in the text. The protagonist does not know what it looks like just like she has not been to solitary, but she knows that both places are to be feared. The access she has to these places is through the patient's reactions when they are sent there. They are often sent involuntarily.

I wanted to work on the continuity of the text so I added a chapter which follows after *He Will Ask for Tea*. This chapter was going to offer continuity for the reader and also add more words to my end goal.

The chapter I find funny is the one about Dr. Mandisa. I think that chapter is funny followed by the chapter about the township school. I like the fact that in that chapter an expert is on the other end of the phone and is supposed to be saying something that an expert would say and what she says is dumb. My concern about the chapter is that it has more dialogue than action and I get nervous when that happens as if the dialogue takes away from drawing the reader in into the characters' world.

I have about 23 000 words written and 17 000 words more to type. I'm already feeling like it was easier to start this project than it is to end it. I did not anticipate these kinds of feelings. I thought sure it would be difficult, but not entirely sure at which point will I begin to feel the climb. The most baffling part of finishing this project is how is my project going to end? Will I leave it open-ended or with a comforting ending?

I would like to leave it with the farewells that my character gives to each woman as she is going back to her family. The promises that are made and not met. The people that she receives calls from months afterwards, and those she never hears from again. I think this makes the story not just about her but about everyone involved as well. Everyone who made it happen.

I'm anxious about starting to write the ending now, when I am 23 000 words in. What if I start writing and reach the ending where loopholes cannot be reconciled? But I have to have faith that I can start writing the ending now and opportunities will present themselves and when I put them down they will fill in the missing gaps and encapsulate the story. I have to have this confidence at this point in my writing because it won't be coming from my supervisor. I am walking this path semi-alone.

I hope that when I get there it would have been worth all the hard work. I hope it will touch the reader and move them. I hope it will make them laugh and make them cry. And that it will bring all the parts of my broken mirror back together.

Week 31 RJ

Chapter seven is based on a memory my character has of her big sister wrongfully punishing her at the age of twelve. Her big sister is probably twenty-one at that time. I offer this chapter to expand on what takes place in the beginning of the book. I invite my readers further inside her relationship with her sister and the kinds of things that transpired between them leading up to the breakdown of their relationship.

In chapter nineteen I write about my protagonist's harp because it is also a part of her memories and her journey into the dark night of the soul. She lost her zeal to play it and that is because of the sexual harassment she received from her ex-boyfriend. I mention it here because I will mention it again later in the text where I refer to how she ended up deciding to give up on playing her harp.

In chapter twenty-five I expand more on my protagonist's affair with Katlego. I make it a little bit more than just a sexual encounter but how she began to see the world. I mention how it changed her as a woman and how she was coming into her own independence. The fact that Katlego was probably her first younger boyfriend might have had something to do with it.

In chapter thirty-two we see the decline in Katlego and her relationship. And in fact, this is the moment when events take a drastic decline in her life. She goes straight into the institution after that. The blanket campaign and being dubbed the Slayer on the radio happens earlier in her academic career. However if the order in which these events happen in the book work as they are, it won't hurt anyone to withhold the fact that they didn't follow this chronology in real life.

In chapter forty-eight I finally got the courage to write about the ending of the story which is getting released from the asylum. I place it there so I can think of other moments to include in the memoir later on in my writing. Chapter forty-nine is also a life-after-the-asylum situation. Although in reality the phone call happened during the debacle with my protagonist's cyber boyfriend. I decided to change the timeline so it can elongate the effect of the ending.

Chapter fifty is where I speak more about Ukho, my protagonist's niece. Chapter fifty-one is where I conclude the case with her playing her harp. Leading us to the epilogue. An epilogue and a prologue are my favourite parts in literature. They carry so much emotion than you can ever find inside the text itself. I like the epilogue because it teaches us to let go. Even if we won't see someone again. And even if we feel helpless.

I'm currently reading *An Unquiet Mind* by Kay Redfield Jamison and *Madness* by Marya Hornbacher. In *An Unquiet Mind* we are introduced to early childhood trauma of Kay's life. The story has a slow pace as it meanders into other things like her relationship with her father and personality traits she shares with him such as liking the sky. In *Madness* we meet our protagonist in the aftermath of her cutting herself. I like how this plot jumps into crisis.

I find it weird writing and reading memoirs how life can be articulated on paper into a tangible story. Not only to convey a story with plot twists but to also have a theme as if life was designed that way. We as writers become co-creators with the universe this way.

Week 32 RJ

Its 1 500 words now left to finish my thesis and I am excited. I cannot wait to submit it and have it read and decided upon. I went ahead and wrote the ending first and surely new chapters came to me afterwards. Not as many as I wanted and not as fast as I anticipated though. I wish I could wrap up this 1 500 words immediately, but I am finding it challenging to write a chapter that meets this wordcount for some reason my chapters shrink.

Speaking of chapters in chapter ten I speak about when my character's big sister taught her how not to cry for her father who was a dead-beat dad. This is one of those memories that make her a toxic person to be around for my character in the book. She has caused her childhood trauma. The short chapter, chapter nineteen brings the reader into the world of the township school once again.

This time the chronicle of the township school experience is mingled with the spirit world that the main character is a part of. Her struggle with her super human spirits becomes her struggle with anger management at school. We see how her spiritual life is hidden and kept a secret in this chapter.

Chapter twenty-seven is about the time before my character gets accepted to study in the university where she loses her funding. It is a time before my character's downfall. Chapter twenty-nine is still about a time before my character's downfall. Chapter thirty-one is a humorous chapter about how reality can be different for two strangers and how those who find themselves in compromising situations get to be treated as the scapegoat.

Chapter sixty-three is about one of the patients who were at the asylum. Her story is also to show how people treat each other as scapegoats when it is convenient for them. Chapter sixty-eight is about friendship and about a moment in my character's life when she was most happy and how her diagnosis makes her doubt the reality of thThobeka Kenene week 33 RJ

Chapter eight is about the people in my character's early life that have made efforts to change her poverty. We get to meet a friend named Noluthando and Father Ted from my character's big sister's catholic church. The chapter is shaped to thank these people in my character's life by mentioning their acts of kindness in the text. They did not last long in the life of the character as she grows up to meet other people and becomes another person. But she looks back and sees them even amidst the storm of the unfortunate events in her life.

Chapter twenty-nine captures the life my character had while coming into terms of being a black educated woman. The privileges she was getting and how she came face to face with those who had less than her at the time although she had lived her life thinking that she is one with those who are poor. In this encounter, she learns that in fact she is privileged and how ridiculous the reality of classism is for the privileged and the oppressed. Her sense of identity is threatened by being overly glamourized by those who want to get close enough to her to use her and overly despised by those who find her presence grotesque.

Chapter fifty-five is an addition to the chapter titled Lost in translation. It brings humour in the text by showing the comic encounter Thobeka has with the other characters. In this chapter she makes an effort to reach out to one of the patience and suffers only ridicule for

it. She is completely quoted out of context which results in her being a scapegoat for the patient to her family.

I have worked on juggling the chapters around once again, because I had a feeling that the last cluster of chapters about my character's life after being admitted to the mental asylum should go with the chapters on my character's earlier childhood memories. Therefore, meaning her memories of her aunt will be followed by the phone call that she receives from her aunt after she is released from the asylum. And her memory of her niece will be followed by her seeing her niece for the first time after she had left for Johannesburg.

I also thought over the epilogue and wanted to have something abstract to put there if I won't make the word count. I decided that a fairy tale could work to draw parallels between what the thesis wanted to convey to the readers and the reader's expectations. I Google a book called Kaffir Folklore A Selection From The Traditional Tales by Theal. I downloaded it from an online library and began reading my favourite story about the cannibal mother.

I thought to myself, how terrible it was telling children about cannibalism and murder and lying. Our elders must have thought we could take all of that stuff. They must have not believed in this thing called innocence or our stories were distorted by the racist powers that were at the time to make us believe that we were capable of cannibalism, murder, and lying.

Poetics assignment

We are amongst people who won't take care of their mental health issues. And that is a shame because mental health issues are a pandemic in South Africa. When I got admitted to the psychiatric hospital I couldn't believe that it was me that everybody was saying she is sick. It felt like people were conspiring against me. It felt like a conspiracy. But I had to grow up and face the challenges of being a bipolar patient.

This meant that I had to keep quiet and take my pills as the nurses said so. It also meant that I had to re-examine my coping mechanisms with my illness which beforehand had been writing. My mother brought me a diary so I could start writing in the hospital should ideas come up. I appreciated that because I believed and still believe that writing is a way that we all could follow in facing our mental health issues.

Some view writing as an escape mechanism but I think writing is more than that. I think writing is about facing the realities that are so horrid to us. Writing is that for me and so much more for other writers too. And in this essay I will talk about reading and writing in a way that can bring healing to the world. I will be writing this essay from the heart but what happens when that heart is broken?

When a writer's heart is broken it falls into pieces like any other ordinary human being. Sometimes, when a writer's heart is broken, those pieces mean that their voice is in small fragments too. A writer struggles to find their unique voice or their voice becomes silenced by the fear that has gripped their heart.

I felt that when Ann Lauterbach spoke about her sister in her article that she spoke about her heartbreak. The pieces that were left behind for her to piece together resulted in her article about the word experimental. Her article is well researched and it shows where she speaks about the American Puritan Jeremiad and their agenda for crisis in society.

In Amina Cain's *Slowness* what stood out for me was her saying that "your body is in the film, or it is in the book," when in the space of watching a film or reading a book. She also says that her "imagination gets everything, and it determines everything too: form, language, narrative voice, character, setting, and so on." I think that is a good virtue in writing for one's imagination to grasp everything and determine everything.

Bell Hooks also speaks about the imagination and how it can take us from oppressive states into new mind states of freedom. It is the imagination that can heal the world of mental health issues. It is the imagination, as Bell Hooks says, that can create new realities for us. She says that without imagination there cannot be new realities.

Ann's sister passed away but it is through the power of imagination that she could write an article about it and cope with her loss. Through writing we can touch our broken hearts and mend them together until we find hope and peace that we are looking for. Our readers too go out looking for hope and peace in what we have written as writers.

In Kate Bernheimer's piece what stood out for me is when she says that "fairy tales magnetize writers who identify themselves as realists, along with surrealists and Dadaists and modernists and existentialists and science fictionists and fabulists (not to mention romance novelists and greeting card authors and tabloid headline writers)." That part for me seems to me that fairy tales are for everybody.

Kate also focuses on four elements of traditional fairy tales. These are namely flatness, abstraction, intuitive logic, and normalized magic. She begins by stating that in flatness it is the characters that are flat. Characters in fairy tales are flat. They are not given many emotions. For example in Sheila Heti's *The Woman Who Lived In a Shoe* the woman is not given many emotions.

Secondly, she mentions abstraction and says that fairy tales rely on abstraction, as not many illustrative details are given in a fairy tale. For example in Sheila Heti's *The Woman Who Lived In a Shoe* there are not many details except that the woman lived in a shoe. She moves

on to intuitive logic, as in fairy tales we are told that this happened and then that happened without an explanation of why. For example in Sheila Heti's *The Woman Who Lived In a Shoe* we are not told how she ended up living in a shoe or why.

And lastly she explains normalized magic whereby in fairy tales the natural world is a magical world. For example in Sheila Heti's *The Woman Who Lived In a Shoe* the fact that the woman lived in a shoe is magical but it is part of the world that she lived in and the men who visit her do not question this norm.

As someone living with bipolar I was drawn to Sheila Heti's *The Woman Who Lived In a Shoe* because as a fairytale it had the ability to soothe. It felt like through this story I was meeting the inner child within me that needed to be embraced. I identified with the themes of isolation that the story showed and as a reader I was looking for hope and peace in the story. Eventually, there was hope for the woman in the shoe, she left her shoe and walked towards her future.

Don't we as readers yearn to be free from the shoe that we live in and to just walk out of it and try out what is ahead of us? It won't be easy to pack our bags and be resolute in our leaving the only comfort zone we are familiar with but sometimes we are called for greater or smaller things beyond our wildest imagination.

Barbara Guest's *The Beautiful Voyage* taught me about poetry. She taught me that poetry is a journey to take; a voyage into the unknown. Sometimes we are propelled by those who leave us behind with broken hearts to take that journey into poetry. I know that when I feel like writing a poem it is when I am at my lowest point emotionally.

A poem comes to me when I am sad. Only then do I take that voyage within and try and paint it through words what it is. I try and describe it and to bring it to the senses through imagination. I try to make it alive and breathe life into it for my readers to see and experience the pain and suffering that we all can go through as ordinary human beings.

Of course now my poetry has to compete with my medication. When I am feeling low it is whether I pick up a pen or I pop a pill. With pills there is no creativity and no imagination required. It is just a dead end for the mind. The West has taken over the world of mental health issues and implemented healing mechanisms that are nearly detrimental to transcendence. I don't go to the pill to transcend the suffering but with poetry I can feel myself transcending.

In cases like colonialism in Guam writers like Craig Santos Perez transcend oppression through reading and writing. This just shows the power of this artform. Writing is the key to transformation because it can confront colonialism just by offering new narratives than those presented to us by the West. A good writer will tell the story of himself and his people first before copying the style of the West.

In Chris Kraus's *Hunger-Technology-Emotion* I learned about her anorexia and her relationship with an Alien. But I am not sure what kind of an Alien is this. Is it the kind we see in science fiction or is it just a word she uses to describe a foreigner. However, her telling her story about her boyfriend gave me ammunition to tell the story about my bipolar in trying to define this artform of reading and writing.

In Dambudzo Marechera's *Beneath reality there is always fantasy* what stood out for me is that there is always fantasy beneath reality and it is the writer's job to reveal it.

I think Dambudzo would agree with Bell Hooks that there cannot be a reality without imagination. However, this imagination must have a facilitator known as the writer to facilitate it to the readers.

After reading Raymond Federman's *Surfiction: A Postmodern Position* I got the sense of what his four propositions were for the present-future of fiction. His first proposition is that of reading fiction. He says that there needs to be a way that fiction is written to break the boring conventional way of reading fiction from beginning, middle, and end.

I think this kind of boring conventional way of reading fiction is exactly what the West has imposed on us writers and readers. It is a norm. But in postmodernity we venture forth into an unknown territory like the woman who lived in a shoe and we experiment. We experiment because our inner child in us calls us for greater or smaller things. That child wants us to play with the imagination rather than to accept our current realities. That child wants us to look at the pieces of our own hearts until we can see beyond the ugly. Dambudzo also calls us writers to find that child and bring it out to play when we are writing.

In his second proposition Raymond says that fiction should never be linear and reflect the life that is not linear. Raymond challenges us to mirror life as it is with all its doubts and fears. In my life I thought I would have a Master's degree by now. That is before I was diagnosed with bipolar. After that my life just took a turn for the darkest alleys known to mankind. What was once linear was now oblique. I would have to go through that process in time by writing fiction that mirrors how things can take a sudden turn. I imagine that I would not allow this sudden turn to silence my voice and that is how I ended up taking a course in creative writing.

In his third proposition Raymond says that the material of fiction that the writer uses could be his experience in writing the fiction. He says that the writer could write about "the pencil or the typewriter or whatever instrument or machine he is using to write the story he is making up as he goes along."

In his fourth proposition Raymond says that the meaning of fiction will be formulated by all those involved in the making of the fiction which includes the writer and the reader. I have seen or met my readers who have said that my poems have touched them in deeper ways that I would ever know. I think this is what Raymond means by involvement. To be willing, as a reader, to be touched by a work of art is to open up your heart and to reach out to the poet. When my readers said that, I got a sense of validation. I felt loved and appreciated and at home. Equally, when my heart was broken I could sense a break up between me and my

readers. I closed myself up to them and started writing about politics, hard things that did not pertain to the soul.

I could feel it when my readers resented me for changing my topic. They did not want to be involved anymore. Slowly but surely, and tragically, my readers stopped reading my blogs because I was committing a social suicide. I was alienating myself from them so that I could nurse my inner child. I guess in a sense I too no longer wanted to be involved in writing poems for the soul. For me to write those poems I would have to feel like I was closer to God, and at the time I had my issues with God and what he had allowed to happen to me. I was going through a loss so deep that I turned to politics to keep up good appearances.

Brian Evenson talks about the avant-garde and compares it to a drunk crazy party guy. I think that is a brilliant example to explain the avant-garde and its way of disrupting the status quo of society. Nobody wants the drunk crazy party guy at their party because nobody knows what he might do or say next. However, if we cared to play like our inner child wants us to we couldn't care less whether the drunk crazy party guy showed up or not. The avant-garde wants us to step out of our comfort zone and to play.

In Mxolisi Nyezwa's *I heard rhythms*, Mxolisi describes to us the makings of the Maskandi genre. I think it is important work that Mxolisi has done to compare inkenqe to duende because he brings together the Western world with Africa. In South Africa, inkenqe is experienced by our praise poets when they are visited by ancestral forces that urge them to speak up in events.

These ancestral forces possess the praise poet's body that he loses absolute control over himself and he begins to speak truths about whomever is at the event. The praise poet is close to what we know as a traditional healer in this sense. However, is inkenqe experienced by praise poets alone or can 'pen-poets' experience it too?

'Pen-poets' can experience the inkenqe too. They too can be possessed by the ancestral forces to write about what they are told to write by their ancestors. These visions come to

them as in a feeling or emotion which moves them to writing on a page the visions that they 'see'.

It is not fair to say that inkenqe cannot be experienced by 'pen-poets' as well because they too are human beings born of ancestral spirits. I believe that I too have inkenqe when I write my poems. I do believe that I am taken over by ancestral forces through my feelings and emotions, and I am not the only one. Other poets have come to me and told me that they too get emotional when writing their poetry.

Writing under the influence of inkenqe is like freewriting. There is no space for editing what you are saying. Only after you have seen what you have written can you revisit it and edit it. And praise poets too can enter the space of 'pen-poets' and begin to be writers themselves as opposed to speaking.

Also another aspect of inkenqe is that a poet loses his or her memory of what he or she had said in an event. A poem spoken under the influence of inkenqe becomes lost in time and in the ears of those who were listening. However when the poem is written down it is never lost.

This would shock the West but I have my reservations about inkenqe. I believe that my bipolar is inkenqe under medication. When I feel strongly about something I write. I believe it is my ancestors sending me to write that which has touched my heart or has called for my involvement. But the West will not see things this way as it wants to drug its patients so I take the drugs as an obligation to those who care about me for who knows where inkenqe might take me. It may take me to the lowest of emotions where I could never be brought back again.

If R.M. Berry talks about how Bush is the channel to which the war begun between America and Iraq then then he might agree with Bell Hooks that imagination does make things happen for reality. We are active agents of our own reality through imagining how our next future would look like.

What stood out for me in Jackie Wang's *Aliens* is how similar it is to Chris Kraus's *Hunger-Technology-Emotion* in that it speaks about aliens and is similar to Brian Evenson's *The Crazy Party Guy* in that it speaks about the avant-garde. But, I am not sure what she means by "aliens have a lot to do with the avant-garde." Again, which aliens are being spoken about here, is it those from out of space or those who are foreigners from another country.

I think Tamiko Beyer's *A slanty kind of racialized poetics* is an important article because racism is a serious issue in America and many other parts of the world. I think the idea for them to use poetry to disable racism is a powerful and virtuous work to do.

I once wrote a poem about race. It was called *What is Black* and in it I was confronting racism as Beyer has stipulated in her article. I was interrogating the word black and I was asking my reader or my audience where did the word come from that it should be used to describe a group of people. In the poem I introduce the idea that blackness was not there in our history as the so called black race.

There is something about Tim Seibles's *Desperate and Beautiful Noise* that reminds me of what Mxolisi Nyezwa says in his article about inkenge or the duende. This something is when he idolizes Jimi Hendrix and his voice.

In Anna Kavan's *On realism* she speaks of her escape from writing in realism for reasons of freeing the reader. Kathy Acker's *The killers* arrives at her argument in an unexpected manner. She begins by telling the story of her friend, then of her childhood and dream, then of her other friend again before delving into the fact that she is against realism in literature.

I thought Linh Dinh's piece was talking to me about poetry and what poetry is. Her piece was a learning process to read. Also Lara Glenum's piece offered lessons on what poetry is and what it should not be.

In Njabulo Ndebele's *Rediscovery of the Ordinary* he talks about the spectacle of apartheid in South Africa and its effect on the Black English writer. I agree with him that black English writers have been a victim of apartheid or spectators of it in South Africa and this has affected their approach to literature for years. The likes of Mbulelo Mzamane have published books with the Ravan Press a book publisher that was anti-apartheid at the time and this is how Mbulelo Mzamane confronted the Boer at the time.

Black English writers in South Africa like Mbulelo Mzamane achieved what Bell Hooks calls the critical fiction. A fiction that teaches about the struggle of apartheid and she calls them narratives of a struggle. Mbulelo used his imagination to transcend his reality. Mbulelo turned to writing instead of falling into the trap of ending up oppressed like his own people but he wrote about this oppression in order to teach the world. We as the readers to his story could be involved in it and see ourselves in the characters that he gives us.

In Taiye Selasi's *Stop pigeonholing African writers* she talks about African literature and how African writers have been classified as such. She shows how this has been a bad thing for African writers to define them as such because they deserve the freedom to write about anything from anywhere. She highlights the lack of publishing houses in Africa and she advocates for the building of these publishing houses. I think it is problematic to say that all writers of colour belong to the African literature section despite the content of their books. I think African writers should also just be writers except when they have written in their indigenous languages.

My contribution to African literature would be romance and more narratives of the struggle. For, I am from the township like Mbulelo and as a good writer I would tell those stories of my people. I would imagine for my people new ways of being through offering them science fiction with characters that are African. I feel that reading these articles have given me a sense of direction on what to read and how to read it because without Bell Hooks's article I would not know how to read Mbulelo Mzamane.

Camile Roy's *Experimentalism* talks about her life in the projects of San Francisco. She narrates her story in arguing for experimentalism versus conventional writing. It is true that in conventional writing there is the masculine and heterosexual hegemony and nothing is mentioned of the homosexual or the queer in society. Experimental work disturbs these narrations and debunks the narrations of the queer.

Marina Tsvetaeva's *Condition of Creation* talks about how a poet is possessed by the subject. She talks about a poet losing control over what they write over to the subject they are writing about. Similar to what Tiff Holland went through while writing about Betty in his flash-novella. Similar to how I have been possessed by my bipolar to writing.

At a conference a writer once said the same thing that sometimes a topic will not leave a writer until it is written down. Then when that topic is written it depends if it is still relevant to the reader or not. Therefore, a subject can be so powerful as to possess a poet but sometimes lose its power by not being written in relevant times, possibly, because the writer wrote his idea too late.

Velimir Khlebnikov's *On poetry* talks about the simplicity of poetry. That the simplicity of poetry should not be imposed on writers because there are also things like spells and prayers that are not simple yet are practiced all over the world. She also talks about the flight from the 'I' when writing a poem. She says that poems are not always written by the person who is in close proximity with the imagery and that a poem of a certain imagery could be written by someone who is remote from that imagery.

Writers like Mbulelo Mzamane write about what they know first-hand. But some writers are not the 'I' in the stories that they write about. They write about the lives of others this is the flight from the 'I' that Velimir speaks of. A good writer must maintain this flight in order to be able to mirror back the reality of life.

Tiff Holland's *How Subject Dictates Narrative Form* talks about his experience in writing the subject he calls Betty. He tells us about his journey from writing poetry to finding Betty as the subject of his flash-novella. What stood out for me was how it seems that this Betty was

haunting him to write. This Betty was in control of his writing and not him even though this Betty was not a real person. This Betty reminds me of what Marina says about the condition of creation.

Brian Evenson's *Afterword to Altman's Tongue* talks about his book and his experiences in writing it and publishing it. He has been punished by the university he used to work for for writing the book and the Mormon Church he was a part of. As a result, he lost his wife in the process of cutting ties with his religion that barred him from writing any further similar works. I found that this article is different from Brian's article on the avant-garde and wonder which one he wrote first and at which point in his life did he write *The Crazy Party Guy*.

What stood out for me in *Someone is Writing a Poem* by Adrienne Rich is when he introduced Lynn Emanuel as the writer of the poem *The Planet Krypton*. I think the poem was very well detailed and gave the imagery of a bomb very well.

Federico Garcia Lorca's *Theory and function of the duende* talks about the Spanish duende and defines it as "a mysterious force that everyone feels and no philosopher has explained." In this article Federico compares the Spanish duende to the Muse and the angel. I find this article similar to Mxolisi Nyezwa's article and I think that it was important work that Mxolisi Nyezwa did to compare inkhenke to the duende.

George Quasha's *Axial Drawing* is about axial drawing. He defines axial drawing in his article as performance art. Antonio Machado's *Notes on poetry* is about lyric poetry and its imagery and metaphor.

In Bell Hooks's *Narratives of Struggle*, Bell Hooks talks about oppression of the black race and the transformation that is needed in the black community. She says that it is through imagination that we can confront racism and evolve from its oppressive hold on our community. Bell Hooks introduces the critical fiction as the vehicle in which communities can imagine a new reality and a healed history for themselves from oppression.

When reading Bell Hooks's article one is reminded of Mbulelo Mzamane's contribution to critical fiction. Mbulelo Mzamane's *The Day of the Riots* is about two characters, Johannes Venter and Sipho who find themselves trapped in the township on the day that the riots break out. In the story you are drawn a picture of what apartheid was like in South Africa, giving your imagination a memory of those times when the Bantu people were oppressed by the Boer.

Mbulelo portrays well the urgency of hiding that was felt by black people and white people at the time of apartheid through these two characters as there was a lot of hiding in the townships done in those days. Mbulelo also paints the picture of the involvement of children in the struggle through Sipho's children singing struggle songs.

In Mbulelo's story you also learn about the basis of the struggle that began the riots of 1976 in South Africa and the laws that were passed and made active by the police at the time. Such laws were the Immorality act that is suggested in the story when Eddie, one of the characters, makes a joke about it to his girlfriend Meikie when she undresses Johannes.

It is tragic that at the end of the story we do not know what happened to Sipho. He does not show up for work the next day after having gone through a lot trying to help Johannes reach his family. It is undoubtable that this story is a critical fiction as define by Bell Hooks as it shows signs of a struggle during the apartheid era in South Africa.

William Carlos Williams's *The Practice* is about his ability to be a doctor and a writer at once. It is about his ability to juggle these two occupations. I also feel that it is possible to juggle two occupations at once. I too have juggled being a poet with being a daughter to my mother, being a sister to my sisters, being an aunt to my sisters' children, and a student during my academic years. It is possible when writing comes naturally to you.

What stood out for me in Aime Cesaire's *Poetry and Knowledge* is the author's vast knowledge of science and how science has affected society.

I think the articles I have reflected upon show us what it sounds like to write a well-researched piece of writing and how to weave it with the personal life as we have seen with Ann's piece and Dambudzo has done that as well, where Dambudzo begins his article with a recollection of his past with literature.

I also think that these articles show us what it feels like to be immersed in the writing of poetry such as illustrated in Amina Cain's article. And when Mxolisi Nyezwa speaks about inkenge he also explains to us what it means to be possessed by the subject you are writing about.

From now on I understand fairy tales because of the description given by Kate. I will read a fairy tale with the four traits that she had provided in her article. I will also continue reading fairytales to feed the inner child in me that wants to play. The child that wants to read for the sake of reading something that has been written for the sake of writing.

I will also understand poetry better as well. Barbara Guest has shown me that poetry is a voyage and Linh Dinh has spoken to me through her article as she would speak to her students, telling me what poetry is and is not. Poetry shall stand as a healing mechanism against the culture of the West that seeks to drug its patients.

Maybe heartbreaks are what we need as writers to be in a mournful state so we can find our inner child and embrace it. Poetry is a voyage not only within to finding hope and peace but also without. Poetry is a voyage to meeting our readers and reaching their broken hearts and touching them warmly.

Poetry is a journey to discovery how we are all the same. How we are all sad in our own way. Poetry is a story of how we have loved and lost and loved again. It is a journey to healing those wounds that are gaping for God to intervene. In a way a good writer does God's work. He or she is a messenger of God to the people to tell the story of the people

and to mirror the reality that is there. A good writer will teach like Mbulelo Mzamane teaches through his work.

Sometimes we will learn that a loss is an opportunity for our inner voice to come out. We will learn that our future is brighter than the darkness we are going through. But to cope through the darkness let us find a book to read and take up a pen and begin to write.

Reader's Report Feedback

"I'm giving you a night call to tell you how I feel. I'm gonna drive you through the night down the hill. I'm gonna tell you something you don't want to hear." *Nightcall*, London Grammar (rendition)

I am grateful for the reader's report. I feel that she aligned with the duende that the text was intended in. I have learned the term duende this year and have learned that it pertains to the standard of excellence that an artform achieves. I learned that it is something that is spiritual. A communication between a poet, a dancer, a fine artist, a writer to his or her audience. As far as I can tell, I think the spirit of duende has been exchanged between me and my reader and that is something to be grateful for. Of course this duende is something that cannot be seen, but it is there. In music, in ballet, in sport, and books. You can imagine how grateful I am, because the duende is very rare to occur. When you have it, it is like gold in your hands. When you have it, it is like power to transform energies in the universe, including human thoughts resulting in what we call 'inspiration' or 'influence'. Working with the MACW team as a whole on this project with the support of my mother and community made this duende possible. And in this interaction, I will express my thoughts about what my assigned reader thought of my thesis.

The reader thought that the prologue works well with my novella. She thinks Monica in the novella is white, but Monica is black. Her understanding of Monica and who Monica is leaves me to understand that I must give further description of what Monica looks like for the reader. And that the character of Monica is not a white girl but a black girl and that Monica has no relation to the white woman mentioned in the prologue. The white woman who appears in the dream of the protagonist is not even my protagonist's lover, but my protagonist experiencing her great-grandfather's memories as her own in the form of a dream. Hence, the white woman is never mentioned again in the novella because she has no relation to my protagonist except she was an epitome of my protagonist's great-grandfather's struggles with racism and is now a haunting: an unknown woman. To fix this in the prologue I will also add, 'unknown', to make sure that the white unknown woman is not confused with those women such as Monica who are introduced in the text.

The reader had some confusion about the italics used in *Nowanted* and *Ukho*. I will fix the matter of italics in *Nowanted* and *Ukho*. The only time I use italics in *Nowanted* is where I mention the title of the short film that the protagonist had done in honour of her grandmother. However, in both the chapters *Nowanted* and *Ukho*, the name is not written in italics except for that moment where it is a

short film title. Perhaps instead of using italics, I can use the font I used for titles like, Graduate Writes a Book to Fundraise.

The reader was confused about the timeframe of the scene where my protagonist hugs the teenage Ukho. The scene is believable if you consider that she had last seen her the Christmas before the year she was sent into a mental institution, and the Christmas after she had returned from her initial studies at the university. Therefore, little time has passed between them. They have been seeing each other irregularly but seeing each other none the less, with cold and mundane interactions between them such as topics about school. I think I have made these time spans clear in my narration of Ukho's life in the chapter *Ukho* that comes before *Seeing Ukho again*. My character has been a part of her life that Ukho would not have questions just boundaries set by her parents to keep the two of them apart.

The reader feels that the second sentence in the first line of the chapter *The Waskom* does not match with the plural mention of waskoms in the chapter. I agree with the reader that the title *The Waskom* doesn't work with a line from the chapter that says "we have waskoms" and I have corrected that by writing *Waskoms* instead. The reader also had some confusion about the point-of-view in this chapter where it fluctuates between "we" and "you" and "I". I will consider removing the "you" point of view from the text because I think it is causing confusion. I was using it to gain intimacy with the reader. But it causes a distraction instead of an attraction. I will try to keep the "we" and see what happens because I feel strongly about giving the reader a true sense of what it feels like to be economically bound as a collective of people.

The reader said that the last two sentence in the chapter *The Key* are a good example of telling and not showing. I agree with the reader that I should remove the last two sentences in the chapter *The Key*. She also said that the second last paragraph in the chapter *Father* is jarring. I also agree with the reader when it comes to the second last paragraph of the chapter *Father* on p. 24. I believe my proper sentence would need to be, "The first letter sounded English and out of place as compared to my sisters' letters that were written in isiXhosa."

The reader also mentioned that I do not have to tell what kind of bird my narrator is talking about in the chapter *The White Feathered Gentleman*. I will trust my reader in not mentioning that the bird is an owl in the chapter *The White Feathered Gentleman*. She also said that the start of *Umvandedwa* does not add value to the rest of the text. I disagree with the reader, I think the start of

Umvandedwa is relevant to the chapter of my character losing her best friend. And as for other introductions, they are fragments scattered around the text to see if they work or not. I cannot tell if they don't work at this point until I will have had a little bit of time and space to consider the finished product. I see what the reader struggles with in *He Will Ask for Tea*, and that can be rectified by showing the protagonist's inner thoughts in italics.

The reader said that the ending to *Intambo Namakhubalo* does not work at all. I agree with my reader, I also feel like the ending to *Intambo Namakhubalo* does not work. I will put *The Green Winged Man* after *We Will Brag*. "In the darkness the next thing I knew they were knocking down the door" will be the opening sentence for *The Wall*. The reader thought that the last two paragraphs in *Playing Mamnguni* could be more polished. I think what my reader didn't understand about *Playing Mamnguni*, the last two paragraphs is that it is the part of the book where my character is most solemn. She is reflecting on her naivety as a girl from a small town used by a man from the big city. This is where she is most open about how she feels as compared to the shocking childhood events in *He Will Ask for Tea* and *The Wall*.

However, I will make the change because I do hear where she is coming from. And I must consider other readers who will be feeling like that about this part of the text. I changed it to, "He loved how innocent I looked, he said. I came to know things I had not known before. Heartless is an understatement of what he was. Blasphemy against love sounds more like what he had done. It was all a game of desire to him, no matter how much I loved him. He changed me from a naïve girl from the country side to the girl who went out into the big city and got lost. How can a harlot touch a holy harp?"

I appreciate the chapters that my reader has acknowledged and appreciated. I think she hit the nail in the head with her observations. She thought that "*The Cleaner, Lost in Translation, and Kind Strangers* are striking pieces that illustrate the dynamics of class and how as human beings we want to connect with others and how easily perceptions influence others." She added, "In *You Are Not One of My Girls* and *What about Your Ancestors* the hostility of Thandi and the rest of the University staff is absolutely appalling, and the sense of hopelessness comes out strongly."

She also said that, "In *Nervous Breakdown* the imagery of the prophet performing the exorcism told from the point of view of the person experiencing the exorcism was striking. Through the character's feisty attitude, the reader really gets to feel the betrayal of the mother and sister subjecting her to

this treatment. And the miracle of the crazy woman at the end of the piece really stays with the reader long after the piece ends.” This feedback makes me feel like I have achieved the goals I had set out for myself through this novella. Because I did want to communicate exactly the feelings that my reader experienced in reading this book: matters of human relationships with each other, whether socioeconomic or socio-political.

The reader’s grammar suggestions are a bit difficult because as I make changes the pages shift too so it is a science of opening older documents and pinpointing where I am. Also reached the reader’s overall impression that says my work lacks emotion. Of course I will re-read what the reader is implying here in these chapters mentioned. What the reader termed their ‘overall impressions’ is, to me, the opposite of what the report started out with, which was more positive.

The reader says, “Pieces like *My Boyfriend Who Played Me*, *Rehearsal for a Revolution*, *Dear Katlego*, *The Tutor*, *A letter from the Inside* are too self-indulgent. They are not as polished and do not feel like they add to the rest of the collection,” I disagree. *My Boyfriend Who Played Me* was written for an assignment on desire. I had to show my desire for something I could not have. When I thought about the topic, I wrote the words that were coming from my heart at the time. I have had to rework the assignment plenty of times for it to be clear and concise about where I stood emotionally. I added it in the text in relation to my character’s desires for something or someone she could not have. I wanted to show her frustrations, so I gave my voice for my character to speak through.

I included *Rehearsal for a Revolution* as a filler, to take a break from the overarching narrative in order to shed light in other aspects of the character’s life. I think it is proven in the text that the chapter *Dear Katlego* should be there to show the opposite of the love affair my character encountered with her cyber boyfriend and to drive a distinction between these two boyfriends in the development of the story. This helps the reader to not confuse the boyfriend in the chapter *Blood* for instance to be the cyber boyfriend but Katlego himself. *The Tutor* follows the life of the character and her boyfriend Katlego at university. This chapter is the calm before the storm in the character’s life.

A letter from the Inside is an exercise that I did with my personal therapist. She asked me to do it in order for me to understand what bipolar is for my own research and personal growth. I included it in the book as Susanna Kaysen includes her diagnostic files in her own memoir. But it is also a window

inside the practical side of the story and the praxis that goes on between therapist and patient confidentiality. It is a salute from me as a writer.

What is left for me to do now is continue making the grammar changes and then rewrite the chapters so that they follow their chronological flow correctly.

After meeting with Henali Kuit (course teacher and my supervisor) last night I had the opportunity to run my questions by her. I had the opportunity to tell her more about the white unknown woman in the dream. That the white unknown woman could be a lover from my character's past life and therefore could not reappear in the character's present life unless by haunting her through hallucinations and dreams.

I told Henali that I think the success of my novella is the fact that I could use my home language in the text whichever way I wanted to. That is, placing it in the title which can be jarring to the reader if the flow of the titles was in English. But this jarring effect was not negative as the reader did not criticise it. Or mention it at all.

Henali was taken aback by the reader's harsh criticism. I said there are some compliments except in the end where I have a problem with the suggestion that I should remove the chapters listed by my reader. I told Henali that I feel that I should keep those chapters. I told her that I have explained in my reader's feedback why I choose to not exclude those chapters from the book. They give the story a necessary break, but also a global view of my character's world.

Henali taught me about titles and different styles there are. I could use an upper-case style for all the words on my title, I could remove the numbering, I could write them as sentences by using the sentence style, and I can use Italics. I began to imagine my chapter titles in Italics our gorgeous and feminine it would feel like for the reader. Or maybe, I could remove the numbering and place lower-case capitals in my titles just to make my book look accessible and relatable for my readers. Or I could keep the numbering to create a different look.

I am grateful to Henali for the call and the support throughout the course. And our experience and journey with the project is somewhat different from how the reader has experienced it. The reader is an outsider looking in, and won't fully understand the emotion that went into making this text. The confusions that Henali and I worked through. And issues we resolved. The reader only gets the

end product or a product under construction but either way cannot see other factors that may have influenced my decisions for this text. In this way, the reader has been my surrogate real-life reader, since all readers will approach my text without knowing how I created it. I am grateful to have had this perspective since it's invaluable. I also hope that any future readers will be more sympathetic to the themes I explore in my novella and to the techniques I employ to explore these themes.

Talking to Henali also helped me understand the reader's suggestions in the grammar section of her report. Like where the reader has said that there are double spacings after several full stops: eg., pg 11, 23, 25, 40, 45, 81. She just said 'double spacings' and I was not following what she was talking about since I did carefully check my novella for typos and mistakes such as these. But when Henali explained that she means there are, in fact, double spacings and we must not have noticed those instances, I had a second look. Unfortunately these do not show on my computer. Henali suggested that it could be our old Word programs and that we must check for those double spacings in the pages mentioned so that my novella will be as polished as possible in the end.

I know I told Henali that I would add a couple more chapters to the book. But in earnest, I don't believe there should be any more chapters added as that would be overindulgent. I believe I have said all I could say about for instance, the cyber boyfriend, Katlego, and Hlompho as well as the father of my character. The reader may have a global view now of the men in my character's life.

Henali and I spoke about the reader's suggestion to remove the word 'clean' from the last line of The Waskom. Henali wanted to know if I had decided on taking the reader's advice and remove the word "clean" from the novella, and I told her that I won't. The word "clean" has significance to my character as it shows how tedious classism is that one can be judged by their appearance. The *mapharas* are unclean therefore are of lower class or are of lower class therefore are unclean.

The process of editing my book also entails that I add introductory sentences to each chapter so that the text can have an overarching narrative. I am also shifting chapters around to see if I can create a flow of events for the reader. Keeping the scenes of the asylum in the foreground whilst the main character's thoughts, emotions, and memories are in the background, although they take up the large part of the book whilst her experiences at the asylum are similar to prompts.

I expected my reader to wonder about the title of my novella. These are the kinds of questions I was expecting from my reader and I guess that is why Dambudzo Marechera opted to have his own set of

interview questions in the beginning of *House of Hunger*. The experience of editing my own work has been quite a journey. I'm glad that I had the chance to communicate my ideas through RJ's and the reader's report. Through these tools I am confident to have ironed out some wrinkles from the pages of my book.

COIL Report 2021

The COIL in Community briefing said that we should prepare to run our own seminars with a community of second year students from New York. This was a great opportunity to share our own work with a community from abroad, and discuss themes with them that we think are relevant to our work and other writer's works we have selected.

Unfortunately, I wasn't there for the first introduction to COIL, I attended half of the meeting and had to leave for supper for the second half. I missed the opportunity where we chose our group members and topics, but a week later I learned that Xolani had chosen to work with me and Teamhw on a theme called Surrealism.

After choosing our groups and topics, we had to record two-minute videos of ourselves, introducing who we are to the New York students, and also get to see them before we got started. I was worried that maybe the technology of using Flipgrid for the first time would be challenging, but the programme was easy to use. I had to decide what to say in two-minutes, and where to film the video from.

In preparation for my video, I watched my fellow classmate's videos as well, to learn from them what was generally expected of us. I learned that I had to say my name twice, the second time slowly, so that the students from abroad could follow how we pronounce my African name. I spoke about my love for writing and told a childhood story linked to my love for writing. Other writers spoke about the things they like to write about, and we all said how much we looked forward to meeting the group.

The first MACW group presented on a theme about discrimination. They were covering the Drum magazine writers of the 1970's. They introduced and discussed apartheid with us and gave us their selection of anti-apartheid writers. Our assignment was to write a moment where we felt discriminated against. I thought this group's presentation was well executed.

For my first assignment, I wrote about body shaming, my experience with being body shamed by my community. We ran out of time before I could read it in our feedback sessions. But for the first time, I got to experience writing from abroad by other students, and got to see how they saw the world and how they interpreted the theme.

The second group presented on silence and stillness, a piece of writing that exhibits this. They explained to us what they meant, and gave us an assignment with pictures on it. We had to write something that engaged with the images in the pictures. We also had to make it sound silent and still.

The third group was my group with Xolani and Teamhw. We had three different ideas about Surrealism, and wanted to bridge the gap between the three of us. Teamhw decided to present the first section of the workshop, which was our introduction and definition of what Surrealism is. Then I would come in and talk about the pieces of poetry I have chosen for the workshop. Xolani would come in last, to talk about the prose section of our workshop.

Xolani and I were then the ones in charge of the assignment phase of our presentation. I gave the students an assignment to go write about a dream that they had, describing how they felt and what they saw and heard. Xolani gave them an assignment on writing from a place of need or emotion. Whether they are hungry in that moment or angry, that they should put it all out there, bearing in mind to show an original universe, a universe that is beyond the real.

I had a great experience presenting our workshop. I felt that I was able to share the knowledge that I had of Surrealism. One challenge that was presented to us was technology. We suffered from load-shedding during class time, so I got cut off in the middle of what I was saying. It is good that we planned for Xolani to be in the same room with me as we presented, so that when things went wrong, we could bounce back and continue the workshop.

The other challenge was that our topic was European, but our brief said we must use African writers' texts as examples. I thought the poetry component was easier, as poetry tends to be surreal, but Xolani was confident in the prose texts that he had found. For the readings, I also approached poets that I could contact, and asked them for their poems. In a way, I reached out to a community of African poets, in order to discuss their work with a community of students from abroad. For our reading, I chose poems by Lesego Rampolokeng, Wally Serote, Indigene Corefio, Mxolisi Nyezwa, and many more.

Xolani wanted to give our students a very low word count so that they would be subliminally tempted to write more. Judging from the work that was produced for the assignments, Xolani's predictions came true. The students wrote beyond the word count, motivated by how low it was.

The other difficulty was the removal of Teamhw from the group, as this was both a devastating and necessary event. It caused an anxiety in the group, and I wondered how odd it would be to only have two members in the group when we had planned for three members.

The feedback sessions were not as bad as I had anticipated. Dr. Allia Matta who was coordinating the COIL programme from New York for her second year students, was present, and she helped me during the feedback. She made sure that everyone got to answer and that everyone kept to time. I was impressed by how hard the students have worked to meet the requirements of our assignments.

What surprised me about the COIL program was that we, the MACW class were also expected to submit assignments together with the students from New York on the days when the other groups were presenting. This meant that we had more work added to the weekly assignments we are given in our MACW program.

The labour paid off, as our assignments were now required for a collaborative project that entailed a publishing opportunity for our small journal. I submitted the piece that I was most

fond of, a poem that I wrote for the silence and stillness group. When I wrote that poem, I almost didn't have anything to submit for the silence and stillness group but eventually I pushed myself to completing the task.

Vangile Gantso (course teacher, poet and COIL coordinator), showed me a few errors in my piece and so I had to edit out the mistakes. Vangile's feedback on my poem was very beneficial, as also I could not read it during the feedback session. I saw the points that she'd made and her points gave my piece a higher dimension. Nelia, who was part of the silence and stillness group, gave me a positive feedback on my poem. She said she loved it, the imagery was vivid, and she liked the repetition, and thought I captured the brief very well.

There were other COIL meetings weeks later, but those were not compulsory. And because I wanted to focus all of my energy on my report on COIL, I asked to be excused from the gatherings. Some of my MACW class members attended these meetings, and felt much rewarded by them, judging from their feedback on the WhatsApp group we had opened for the COIL program.

I think the COIL program is beneficial to the MACW program because it allows us to speak at length about the themes and texts that we love and about our work and growth as writers. It also puts us in the same position as our lecturers, and to experience what it must feel like to run an actual seminar. To top it all off, the collaborative project gives us the opportunity to write together, and to put our best foot forward.

I hope that the New York students also feel that the COIL program was beneficial for them. I hope that upon meeting us, their literary experience has been enriched. We produced a lot of work in a short period of time. This means that we could always go back to the Google drives and read all that we have written, and watch the workshop videos.

There should definitely be another COIL program next year, and more African literature excavated and scrutinized. If there are more interactive programs like this, it means that

there's a bright future ahead for my writing career. My writing can reach other places; I have also gained the skill to teach, so aside from writing I can teach too.

I have also gained the skill to work with others, and negotiate my thoughts with other writer's thoughts and what they deem as possible to achieve. Shaping reality with others is a rewarding experience. I am grateful for the COIL program.

Book Review 1: Jose Saramago's *Blindness*

In this book review I will be reviewing Jose Saramago's *Blindness*, and how it relates to contemporary culture and explores violence. In the beginning of the year I was drawn to *Blindness* because I thought it was a compelling story. I thought it was fresh and original and very powerful. When I started reading it, I felt its influence on my mood. I felt uneasy to as I read further because I was afraid of what laid ahead. I was put on tenterhooks after the first incident of the epidemic in the novel.

It transpired that this man, the first blind guy, was going to be the focus of the story, or rather his wife. And the dialogue between the characters was not going to be given quotation marks. The characters themselves were not going to be given names. The city was going to remain anonymous and random. The epidemic was not going to be given any rationalization. Saramago was going to string me along a long in a rally of elongated paragraphs where the plot is heavy and difficult to take in.

It is said that Jose Saramago's work is allegorical of historic events. I looked this up and discovered that the mental institution that the patients are admitted to in *Blindness* is descriptive of the prison cells "during the war and detention centres where political prisoners were kept during the autocratic regime of Antonio Salazar of Portugal," (Lakshmi, S. 2021.). It is possible that Saramago had witnessed and heard stories about how these prisoners were treated in the detention centres and that he put it in the book as the mental asylum.

The blindness he writes about is milky white, and is called the 'white evil' in the novel. There appears a dog called the 'dog of tears' in the novel. I think the relationship between the two is Saramago showing how humans tend to be inclined towards judging things and putting labels on things in order to put into context or give meaning to things like the epidemic and the dog.

The blindness could symbolize questions about race politics, or it could symbolize a disillusion with sight, or it could be exploring man's inclination to violence. There's a hint of absurdism in the style of writing that Saramago chooses which could mean that he is making some kind of ideological argument through this novel. The way that people start defecating where they are because they think no one sees them, is also a sign of some dystopia and darkness in the story.

The novel also does not allow any closure for the reader. The reader feels like they want to know what caused this epidemic and also how it is going to end. But we don't get to know that. It makes the book scarier. Because I have faced similar questions with COVID 19 when it broke out. Before that year was 2019. I was living in a computer lab and tutoring to a group of first year students. The thought that the cleanliness of my hands or exposure of my mouth and nose would put me in danger did not cross my mind. If COVID 19 hit while I was out there, I would not be here today.

So when it hit it was after I was released from the mental institution. It makes me wonder how it impacted institutions like that one where patients won't always remember to wash their hands or want to wear a mask. And the paranoia around who created COVID 19 didn't make things easy.

War, violence, and incarceration seem to be the themes of this novel. Where the moral fibre of a city is deteriorated by a malicious epidemic. The problem is not that the epidemic

exists, but how the people who have contracted the disease are treated and how their sense of humanity deteriorates, giving way to their animal instincts. That is riveting.

Why blindness? Why send people to a mental asylum if they are blind? Why not a hotel?

Although the only person who is able to see and therefore become a hero is a woman, it is difficult to argue that this is a feminist text. She is a woman, but she is also trying to survive with the other characters who are not women. She did not choose only women to come out with her. Nor did the epidemic target only women in the novel.

In closing, a book like this makes us feel paranoid, but it also teaches us a lesson. We only need to be careful and we will be fine. If a neighbour goes blind and needs to be driven back to his house, drive him to his house and don't steal his car.

Book Review 2: Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground*

In this book review I will be discussing Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground*.

The first time I heard of *Notes from the Underground* was through a friend in 2012. He had just been through a break up and he was recommending that his friends going through the same thing to read either this book or *The Outsider* by Albert Camus. His mission, which later became our mission, was to help each other to be able to conceptualize and transcend heart break. My friend strongly related to Fyodor, especially when the story is about the protagonist's love interest.

My friend sent me the book and I opened it. I liked the style that it is written in – it sounds like ranting. For me, the ranting symbolized what an existentialist thinker must feel. This work could be a mirror of Dostoyevsky's honest thoughts and psyche around that time. I also like the academic tone to it. How he theorizes and intellectualizes what happened to him in part one and what actually happened in part two. I think ranting is powerful and also when you use an academic tone.

The academic tone in his work makes you feel like this writer has something worth listening to. He is about to make a philosophical stance that you will never forget. And a lot of readers who have come across this book have not forgotten it. It is an influential book, but I worry that sometimes we valorise the writer for articulating how we feel, that we do not see it when we are in danger of being misled. He must have gone through a heart break, but he embodies a culture of young aspirations. Drinking alcohol and hooking up with girls. Entertaining the kind of drama that lends your ego in crisis. Questioning Christianity.

So, in this book review I would like to address toxic masculinity. I will start by defining toxic masculinity and then draw parallels to how the protagonist in the novel can incite toxic masculinity in readers like my friend. When I continued reading the novel, I noticed that it excludes the female reader. The underground man clearly addresses 'gentlemen' in his novel making us assume that he is talking to men not to women. He says while addressing

the reader, “No, sir, I refuse to be treated out of wickedness.” As if all of his readers are or should be men.

This is to say that women are not welcome here. This is a story about a white man who thinks he is smarter than everybody else, especially women, and he carries on ranting about it. Ranting also creates a sense of familiarity to the voice of the author. That even if his actions of excluding me as a black woman are horrendous to me, I can still relate to him and his zeal for youth through his ranting.

“At that time I was only twenty-four years old. My life then was already gloomy, disorderly, and solitary to the point of savagery.”

These words, spoken at the beginning of part two, are the words that could best define where my friend was at the time. Gloomy, disorderly, and solitary. He disappeared to Lord knows where or sometimes appear upset about another friend of his that is in trouble. Stabbed or lost to insanity. He must have read these lines and saw a reflection of his circumstances.

I know, because if we got into an argument, he would text me a quote from this book and I would feel like it is a poor way of reconciling after an argument with a friend. And frankly, it shows the superficiality of the ego. The inauthenticity, as it were. To pull out a line from your favourite pop song to apologize to someone is as manipulative as pulling out a line from a book that is considered to be highly intellectual.

It seemed to my friend that finding commonalities between his behaviour and that of the author, could rationalize him emulating the underground man in his relationships. Which is how toxic masculinity works. You identify with Arnold Schwarzenegger’s character in *Terminator* and you want to go and shoot people thinking you won’t get shot. That is how most people in the hoods say they came into criminality. They saw it emulated on television, songs, and video games.

At the beginning of the year, course supervisor Paul Wessels asked that we be careful not to emulate the authors of our favourite books and isolate ourselves too much from the world and I am always careful of that. *Notes from the Underground* is a wave of emotion from start to finish carrying water that can either be dirty or clean. Caution is advised.

Book Review 3: Dambudzo Marechera's House of Hunger

The first sentence: "I got my things and left," implies that the house of hunger already exists for the reader. It was already there in the narrator's life before the narrator decided to vacate it. He was going to leave, and he was going to take his things with him, leaving the house of hunger behind. There must be valid reasons as to why this narrator should leave the house of hunger, the reason is in the title itself. It is hunger. A house, a symbol of entrapment of hunger.

Some research on Dambudzo has questioned if he was indeed mad or if there was a method to his madness? I think there was. I think he might have been really mad, but may have also had some relationship with his illness or else he wouldn't have been able to create or articulate himself. Or if he was beyond redemption kind of mad, his illness may have been too unique to diagnose at the time. Neo personality disorders as compared to the umbrella schizophrenia.

In my experience with mental illness, it has seemed as if illnesses like schizophrenia, depression, and bipolar, become treated like umbrella illnesses, and other personality disorders are seen as minor or less common. There might be racial issues involved also in how we try to treat black people suffering with mental illness. We tend to not believe it when a black young woman stops eating or is socially anxious, or rather cuts herself. Much is the same when society cannot believe it when white young women are diagnosed with borderline personality disorder. They placed judgment in how they diagnosed them in the 1960's saying they were promiscuous, this according to Susanna Kaysen's *Girl, Interrupted*.

In his interviews, Dambudzo Marechera speaks about 'intellectual rape of the black person'. I think it goes broader than that. I think the one who is stronger is the one who gets to frame the events that are about to unravel in your story. So, the power is either in your hands or theirs. Sometimes you don't get these kinds of power struggles, but sadly there are

times we do. In Dambudzo's case, it was between blacks and whites as well as the whiteness that lived inside of him and the blackness that despised him.

That is why he wrote *Identify the Identity Parade*. Dambudzo was telling us that he is undergoing a tremendous existential or identity crisis in which he looked for jouissance. Just like a classical 'edgelord' Dambudzo started promoting nihilism in his language. "Fuck you," he would abruptly say in the middle of a pristine sentence. He carries his way of speaking, to his way of arranging paragraphs and sentences in *House of Hunger*.

At the very start of the book, why must the policeman who parade in the neighbourhood be emphasized to be black? Is it the possibility that this parade would not happen in the white neighbourhood and so they send blacks to police other blacks?

I think aliens took Dambudzo and made him not just smart but smarter than those around him. I think they inhabited his body and that explains why he drank too much. I think aliens inevitably kidnapped him. He was out of this world. One would have to be out of this world to have taken the chances that Dambudzo has taken.

I don't understand why there are dead guerrillas in the novel. And that is similar to the example I have used above. If I could write half as good as Dambudzo did, I could lure my reader's mind into any snare. Imagining Dambudzo featuring in a science fiction for example. Or juxtaposing two different plots and seeing what the effects are.

Youngsters who are into 'edgelords' are confusing one another because the men think the women want bad boys, and the women think the men are being misogynous. All because black women read *House of Hunger* and relate in levels that black men cannot understand. So, black men will emulate the narrator in *House of Hunger* to appear sexually appealing. This ideological understanding will take place in intellectual bars where you will also find youngsters who are the New Agers and collectively vibe around hippy stuff.

In this sense, I have seen in this book what I wanted to understand in the beginning of the year. How is it a 'cult novel'. It is because of the relevance of the book in an 'edgelord' cult context. In the sentence: "Gut-rot, that was what one steadily became," for example, the more conventional structure, "Steadily, one became gut-rot," is not opted for. This gives the sentence an edge and a punch. It is because of the style in his writing that make him seem like he might have had a method to his madness, but upon listening to interviews with him where he says blacks are being intellectually raped, it raises an eyebrow.

New Agers and 'edgelord' cultists may support his alcoholic behaviour by saying he could have been possessed by a genius spirit that only ate alcohol and consumed it through his body. Or as edgelords are nihilists who have undergone tremendous hardship may say that he was a troubled soul. If the adversary he was going through was laid bare in his novels and poems and he had mental illness, was everyone in his life powerless to help or did they all despise him?

I think it matters if you are despised or not because those two factors create our ideas of who is a hero and not and therefore we can ascertain or anticipate what might happen to someone in the future. If in reality, you decide to emulate Dambudzo's behaviour or lifestyle, the people affected by your behaviour may not like you. Regardless if you think your attitude is cool. You may be certified as a sociopath or a psychopath. You may be sent to a mental hospital, prison, or die homeless. These are the real consequences of being a nihilist. Not what is romanticized in literature.

What is bizarre in Dambudzo's case is that the edgelord in his books is celebrated as well as the homeless man who died at a very young age. It's not bizarre enough that he expressed his misogyny in the *House of Hunger* and black women still love his work. It's as if Dambudzo left a footnote written in fine print for only the black young generation to understand. He was calling all black masochists and sadists to join him. He must have been a masochist to not be able to know when to behave in a way that best benefits him until he could be at a place where he wants to be.

If the case is that he couldn't judge his actions due to his mental illness, then he should have been restrained instead of allowed to write anything. He should have been kept in a nuthouse not watched living on the streets. In *House of Hunger* he shows that there is an attempt he makes to leave the house of hunger in the beginning but his rumination or narration to the reader delves even deeper in the house of hunger.

I believe in the saying that ignorance is bliss. Readers want to be triggered by women being abused, of parents manipulating children, by the government manipulating its people, and the self-aware narrator. But if we are to allow young minds to open life transforming or influential texts, it is best we take caution. We do this strongly on television shows and movies, we do this in music, we hardly do it strong enough for books because of the assumption that no one is reading.

There are NPO's geared around promoting reading and the creative writing courses themselves are there to promote reading but how important is our sanity in what we are reading. Are you not intellectually raping me, then, if you dictate all rules of our engagement? There was a period when I advocated for reading thinking nothing of it. However, encountering Dambudzo makes you rethink reading and writing.

For instance, *House of Hunger* is a novel, yet he is not ashamed to present it as an autobiography. Especially when he talks about how politicians treated writers during and after the struggle for Zimbabwean freedom. My favourite part of the book is his personal self-interviews where his line of questioning is very unique. That is something I would definitely do for my books because I feel like interviews should come from the writer himself. It is his research, his thesis, his journey, so why not?

I liked how he centred the house of hunger in the beginning as a framing mechanism to frame the story. I wonder how he avoided grammatical errors with the style of speech that he used. His spirit has taught me a lot about writing and politics and being a rebel black. I do hope we regard books more carefully and take more caution when reading them. We could start with more reviews that let us in to what to look out for in relation to our mental

health. That should be the cult for Dambudzo Marechera's legacy, a cult of real healing and consciousness of black pride. As well as a cult of black intellectual leaders and a cult that is inclusive of beautiful, diverse people to form a sense of community for rehabilitation and cohesion, so that we can hold on to morals that are degenerating due to the rise of nihilism.

Book review 4: Susanna Kaysen's *Girl, Interrupted*

Mental illness can become a matter of family versus individual. From political or social aggression against sensitive people, artists, LGBTQ+, and to microaggressions that magnify the individual's insecurities and destabilize their self-awareness. When that process is violent, a girl can be disturbed, and I think the title *Girl, Interrupted* is taken from that perspective.

In an interview with Winona Ryder (2015), the actor playing Susanna Kaysen's character in the film version of the book, she is asked what stood out for her in Susanna Kaysen's novel. Winona tells the journalist that the protagonist captured her struggles and that she found the character of Susanna captivating too. I resonate with what she said, because at the time when my supervisor was referring me to the book, I did not know it was the movie I had watched as a little girl. I couldn't remember how the story went so revisiting it in this way was rewarding to me.

Winona goes on to say that, if you were a sensitive person in the 1960's or a woman, they would lock you up. If your parents were annoyed with you, they would lock you up. And that is what we see in the second chapter called *Taxi* or where she says, "What about me was so deranged that in less than half an hour a doctor would pack me off to the nuthouse?" (Kaysen, p.39)

We are given this struggle with what is true in the novel. Was it in her power to sign herself into the nuthouse or was it in the doctor's and the parent's power? Did she try to commit suicide or was it really just a headache? The third chapter gives us a list of pathologies that a patient could be going through. Some of these pathologies are just parents being annoyed

with their children to the point of sending them away for two years under heavy medication.

Winona goes on to say that nowadays parents can't afford to send their children to asylums because the government has no funding, so they are only kept there for 21 days. I've seen interviews on talk shows about parents trying to raise funding to send their children to a mental hospital or cases where the child eventually commits suicide because of his or her illness and due to lack of funding for treatment.

It makes you feel sad for those parents who cannot help their children that are in need of mental health care. These children suffer without medication or tests being done to ascertain what their condition is and there is no real care for them because no one has money in the bank. Mental illness is a tricky situation where truth seems to be bended by the people involved. The tragedy is either not getting treatment or being treated for no reason.

It is triggering to read Susanna Kaysen's memoir with regard to the time when it was written. For, the 1960's was a time when white men were still trying to figure out what their wives wanted. Susanna Kaysen was of that generation of white girls who were sheltered and lived in a segregated world.

I can relate to Susanna Kaysen's story. Although, in my case, I was a 31 year old black woman. I think what annoyed the people who were involved, was that I am black and that my blackness had put me – or was going to put me – in a vulnerable state or at a disadvantage. My family was annoyed that my blackness meant that I belonged to a group of youths who are unemployed despite their level of education. My family and myself were depressed. It was a depressing situation.

I think the people who were in power, saw my vulnerability and disadvantage as a chance to exploit me and to have their own way. So, they included me in things without my consent or

excluded me from things that I would have benefited in attending. The former was bad, but I could always say, “No, I don’t want my pictures taken,” for example.

And it would be the end of it. However, the latter was worse because it ate at me to not be valued enough to be invited to anything.

Another thing that contributed to my mental illness was the separation between business and home. The same as the separation between education and home. Home became a distant place that I migrated to and became a person separate from the one I portray out in the world. This led to depression, because when you cannot process things on your own in your old childhood bedroom, things become messy on the inside.

The people in power were the ones dictating to me what my illness entailed. I remember seeing a social-worker, who said to me that when they send me to the institution I will feel better because I will be medicated.

Someone at the university I attended told me:

“You are functioning at this level,” and he put his hand below a threshold.

“Whereas the rest of us are functioning on this level,” he said, putting his hand above a threshold.

“Once we get you onto medication you will be thinking like the rest of us.”

The real reason I was being put away is, according to Winona, because I was annoying. I was homeless and had no means of supporting myself. I was so fixated on getting a job and having my own place to stay, that I didn’t care where I was staying at the moment and what could happen to me. But because I was old enough to be a parent there was no reason for me to be treated like I was a child. However, many of us from black families are treated as children at the ages of 35 due to culture or unemployment.

The separation between my education and home or business and home caused disorientation and distrust in my family. The world was judging me as a woman and they saw me as a child – as their baby. They wanted me to succeed and get a job and a house but

somehow not grow out of psychological barriers that kept me from becoming the wonderful person that I am. I could not be a woman, and I could not be sexual, I could not express desire at home, and yet I was to perform desire for the world.

My family was proud of me, but they missed the child or baby that they kept in the house so now that I was away, they had to stalk me 24 hours a day. They had to send me bible verses so I remember God. I had to answer their phone calls whenever they called, or they would call the residence warden. Once, when my mother was visiting my residence, I drank myself into a stupor to show her that I really don't care anymore. She had a look of genuine shock in her face. I almost got in trouble with the wardens. They asked her if she had never seen me drunk before. It was as if her 6 month old baby was drunk on wine. She said no with sadness and disappointment. I did not care.

It is this I-do-not-care part that I try to reconcile with. If I didn't care, then I should not be bothered so much about how the world turns. And if I am bothered, not so much that I cannot function in my life. When I first realised that I hold resentment towards my mother, I thought it was juvenile. I mourned the fact that I was 21 years old holding grudges with my mother and siblings. I needed a break to let go and feel feelings that were fresh and about womanhood, maybe make my desires uninterrupted.