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**Part A:** Thesis (Creative Work)

**Part B:** Portfolio

# **THE CATCH-UP GAMES**

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# **The Catch-Up Games.**

**a novella**

Final Thesis

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Part One:  
Sexual horrors and other family issues

## **The family.**

Yesterday evening my 28-year old cousin Nomaqhawe told her mother that marriage is not her thing. The family meeting is 12pm next Saturday.

My aunt, along with her siblings, my father included, grew up in the 'old' South Africa where the mere mention of the word democracy earned black people a reputation for being terrorists if they were lucky, and landed them in jail if they weren't. So, my aunt, along with her siblings, my father included, are unaccustomed to what seem like untraditional lifestyle choices. The idea of a young, healthy and professional woman choosing not to marry, when there is no sign that she's been bewitched is an untraditional idea and calls many things into question.

My aunt is a single mother of four and a former school principal. My dad is the second born. He's the entrepreneur of the family (I say that rolling my eyes). My grandparents' third child died in '98 after giving birth to twins, out of wedlock; as a result, they stay with our grandparents. We refer to them as Amawele, never Themba and Zonke.

There is a lot to say about Themba, so I won't start with him just yet. Zonke is a Jesus freak and is wonderful when you are broke and in need of money for petrol or a new debit order you didn't budget for properly.

There is also a wayward uncle of mine in Cape Town whose Instagram posts depict a rather lavish lifestyle way beyond what a male nurse's salary affords. Later I will touch on the questionable sexual encounter I had with him in my teens when he was still a nursing student and the joke of the township. He has two children though, so he's surrounded by a cloud of mystery.

I am an only child with a total of eight cousins (that I'm aware of) who have identified me as the family coconut on account of what they say is my perfect English, my endless collection of white friends and my insistence on using olive and coconut oils in my cooking.

We moved to the suburbs in '95 just after Madiba raised the Cup for the entire world to see that South Africa was wonderful.

Our great grandmother recites fanatical stories about life on the farm with amabhulu\*. Back then amabhulu did the most. It is important to note there is a difference between amabhulu and abelungu\*, more on that later though. Well into her 90's now, Gogo recalls earning 25 cents per fortnight and is still convinced that amabhulu held her best interests at heart when they gave her wages to her father for safe keeping. It is virtually impossible to erase the awe in which my Gogo holds her parents and amabhulu. As a 20-year-old back in her day, she could not be trusted with a tremendous amount of money like 25 cents, lest she went and ruined her life with things like buying the newspaper or a book. Our great grandparents did not question or challenge the status quo. They simply didn't have the tools to.

**NOTES: amawele: The Twins**

**amabhulu: Boer (Are generally Afrikaans Speaking) umlungu White people (English)**

They weren't groomed or nurtured in a manner that encouraged the development of independence of mind and opinion. When I ask my great grandmother what her dreams were back then she laughs and says, "The same as every girl of the time. Getting married."

There is something to be said about her generation though. Gogo's work ethic is unmatched. She is usually up before any of us youngsters and will be seen in her garden picking spinach and what have you. She is the sweetest and most loving person you can talk to when and if she remembers who you are, but there is a curse word on the tip of her tongue just waiting for you should you cross her or say something nasty about Nelson Mandela.

When we listen carefully to Gogo's stories we realise it has long been in the DNA of black parents to unwittingly sabotage the creation of generational wealth. Our forefathers had children so they'd have co-workers on white-owned farms. A black man back then was considered masculine or sterile in terms of the number of children he could produce for *ibhulu lakhe\**. Our great grandparents, our grandparents and even our parents were raised with the hope and the teaching that they would work to financially support their parents and siblings. *Ukuzala kuzolula\** the Xhosas say. As a result, little provision was made for the children's future because it was believed and accepted that children grow up to take care of their parents and when the time is right they get married and have children of their own to care for them. A tried and tested cycle.

So when my cousin announced to her mother that she will not get married, that she hopes to travel to each country in the world before she turns 50, she places a bomb in the carefully built fantasy in her mother's mind and disrupts the expected order of life's events.

You see there is a catch-up game that threads through black families. Our elders demand from us the achievements, hopes and dreams that eluded them and their parents and their parents' parents. To my aunt, her daughter's marriage, more particularly her daughter's *wedding day* would prove *her* success as a mother.

There are two family WhatsApp groups. The first one we share with our parents and we do not under any circumstances use the word 'fuck' or any porn GIFs to illustrate a point or frustration of whatever kind. This is where we remind each other of birthdays, family events and where we gossip about other people's children. The second WhatsApp group is just for us cousins. It's where we let our real, hard-core shit unfurl and it's where my cousin Nomaqhawe gives us a blow-by-blow account of her mother's outrage and the proceedings of the family meeting where she is at the top of the agenda.

I recall when we were nine or ten years old and we sneaked into the kitchen for snacks and custard one night only to find my aunt drinking Stoney from the bottle. She first appeared as a shadow and I thought she was one of the baddies from RoboCop. I have always had an overactive imagination. I'm not talking about a sip or two, I mean she gulped the contents until the bottom of the bottle faced the ceiling, until we could see what we thought was the rock in her neck moving as she swallowed. You are made of hard stuff if you can gulp down large amounts of Stoney without flinching or choking.

**NOTE: *ibhulu lakhe*: his Boer / *Ukuzala kuzolula*: To have children is to free oneself**

She burped and looked down at us with no surprise in her expression, as if we were pathetic little ants standing on her cold ceramic tiles, barefooted in our pyjamas. As is her habit she reminded us that it was *her* house and if she caught any of us drinking *her* Stoney from the bottle she'd wring our necks and feed us to Gogo's ducks. Isn't it incredible how our parents teach us to do as they say and not as they do? My aunt learned WhatsApp and Twitter without the aid of any of the youngsters in the family, so she's a woman we take very seriously.

When we think of our aunt, naturally we picture her in the kitchen where she is most dominant; frying, boiling, baking or roasting. I can just imagine her busy face when she says to Nomaqhawe, "You've been bewitched my baby. Why else would you choose to waste your money going from country to country just for fun instead of finding a husband? A rich husband to take care of you."

Black mothers or perhaps all mothers tend to assume that their daughters will end up with rich men and therefore promote the idea in their daughters' minds that the most suitable type of man is a rich one, regardless of how many other qualities a man might possibly possess.

"We can go to that Nigerian Pastor everyone is raving about and pay him to pray for you," she adds. "God answers Nigerian prayers much faster than other African prayers these days." It was my aunt who taught us to leave the lights on when we go on holiday so that neighbours and passers-by would think someone was home. As a result, our homes have never been burgled.

And I know that my dad will add fuel to the flames and will annoy the shit out of Nomaqhawe. When we were teens, my dad overheard my cousins and I debating the definition of jealousy. Unexpectedly he said, "Jealousy is when you see goats having sex and you start throwing stones at them. Are they in your room?" he asked. "Is it your girlfriend that is getting it?" And then he smiled and left us wondering how we were supposed to think of him from then on. Black fathers are happy and take pride in introducing their sons to seemingly innocent sexual discourse, on the assumption that their sons are heterosexual. The successful sex lives of black sons, strangely translates into boasting points for black fathers. When I was in Matric I told my dad I was ready to go to the bush\*, in his excitement he said, "Uzotsho uziyeke ezinto zakho zobumoffee." From his expression and tone my dad believed he was giving me a loving compliment. Of course, for his sake I had to let him think that he had. Our parents need to feel that we are protected by their beliefs, ideas and deep-rooted misconceptions, so lying to them makes life a lot easier. On account of the way our parents parent, because of the catch-up games they play with us, we often find ourselves (and I don't know if it's the same with the whites) telling and showing our parents what they want to hear and see. It is always the simplest thing to do but it's tiring. So, after I came from the bush I dated girls because I had to showcase my manhood to my dad and prove to him that the eight sheep he slaughtered when introducing me as a man to the world were not a waste.

**NOTE: ...ready to ...the bush: initiation school or circumcision / uzotsho uyeke ubumoffee: You'll finally stop your gay tendencies**

The family meeting I mentioned at the start will be set in motion by Nomaqhawe having to serve everyone tea and biscuits, except for my granddad who will be given coffee and rusks because he just has to be controversial. Coincidentally or not, the meeting takes place on the long weekend when my male nurse uncle is visiting from Cape Town. The plan is for everyone (except abantwana\*) to spend that weekend at my aunt's. I don't envy Nomaqhawe for all the time she's going to spend at the sink doing dishes.

My aunt's primary concern is that her rivals will think she's cursed if her daughter doesn't marry or if her daughter indeed does come out as a lesbian. Worse than being cursed, people will say she has somehow angered the ancestors. No black person wants to be known as being on the wrong footing with their ancestors. Often our parents don't have a problem with our choices, but the difficulty comes into play when they realise that people are going to talk. 'Bazathini abantu?' \* My aunt's rivals consist of some of her former colleagues and a great majority of the women in her church, especially the ones she likes having over for tea and scones after service. Last year one of them concocted a vicious rumour that my aunt was having an affair with the Pastor. As flattering as a rumour of that nature is, my aunt is a woman who's been known to say, 'where there's smoke there's fire', so she underwent an enormous amount of scrutiny and humiliation on account of said rumour. As pay back, my aunt withheld her catering equipment and planning skills from all church fundraising activities for several months, and as one of the deacons put it, 'the church felt the pinch'. In the catch-up games there are extreme levels of hypocrisy and the generation brought up on corn flakes, PlayStation and The Bold and The Beautiful is often collateral damage. There is an invisible velvet rope that the outside world must stay behind, while we, the masterpieces, maintain our dignity as rare and priceless works of art moulded by our parents. Ironically the idea that Noma is a lesbian is reinforced by my dad, causing her to send through a flood of LOL's and laughing emojis. It is ironic because although I am discreet and straight acting, yours truly is an undisputed homosexual staying and sometimes hosting under my father's roof. On one of the rare occasions where we happened to watch a series together, two men kissed and he said, "Sies," and he left the lounge. My dad is known for his Mandela style dress sense and his ANC shirts. During election time he is part of the convoy that drives around the township hooting behind a certain politician's motorcade with ANC flags and stickers all over his new Hilux. He is a tenderpreneur,\* so he has good reason to want poor people to vote ANC. I have never seen him more panicked than when Helen Zille made those frequent visits to PE. "If that bitch takes the Metro we are dead comrades," I'd overhear him speaking on the phone during the early hours of the morning. My dad is of the same opinion as my aunt that all the children must marry. He calls it 'finishing'. "You kids must finish. I want Skhomo to see all of you finishing. You are all old enough now."

**NOTE: abantwana: the children**

**bazathini abantu: what will people say**

**tenderpreneur: A businessman whose main source of income is government tenders in South Africa**

Skhomo is our clan name. My dad refers to our granddad as Skhomo.

“But how can the ancestors bless you if you are a lesbian Nomaqhawe?” is his question. “I don’t know that many successful lesbians in this township. And for that matter how does this lesbian business work?”

My cousin’s physical appearance isn’t doing her any favours during this trial; nor is her nonchalance. She is more on the masculine side, she is flat-chested, she never wears make-up and by her own choosing, my cousin is bald. On countless occasions she has been interpreted as a butch lesbian. Often we joke about how God or whoever is responsible for allocating spirits to bodies, played a trick on the family by creating me as a male and her as a female. Whenever she is invited to a baby-shower I’m the first person she calls when she needs to put an outfit together or whenever she needs to come across as a ‘girl’s girl’.

The truth behind this meeting is that Noma has recently declined a marriage proposal from her on and off again boyfriend Oliver. In Port Elizabeth, young, accomplished black men like Oliver are as common as pearls on the highway; so when a young, black woman raised on a teacher’s salary allows such a fortuitous opportunity to pass her by, she raises some eyebrows amongst her immediate family.

“You could have easily gone for thirteen to fifteen cows at seven thou each,” observes my dad who is probably seated on the Lazyboy like Solomon on his throne.

“Eight thousand. At eight thousand each,” my aunt corrects him from the kitchen.

At this revelation of a rejected proposal and Noma’s estimated value, my granddad shakes his head the way old men do when they are disappointed and my grandmother stops her knitting to clap once, the way black women do when they indicate their disbelief.

“Anyone who deprives his or her family of a small fortune at a time when the President is busy raping vulnerable young women and the country itself is selfish to say the very least,” says my grandmother.

A less liberal thinker would have been dented by this last remark, but my cousin is blessed with a level head. She is always quick to remind us how our grandmother will tell us that sex is bad but with the same mouth she will urge us to have kids before she joins the ancestors. Our grandmother is in a hurry to join the ancestors. She believes that once she is on that spiritual plane, she will be in the most ideal position to inflict the necessary wrath on certain family members who’ve wronged her. Yes, like Ayra Stark our grandmother has a list. \*

On the family chat group my male nurse uncle informs everyone that his flight out of Cape Town has been delayed so he gives my aunt the go-ahead to dish up without him. This is an insult as far as my aunt is concerned. Everyone in the family knows she detests dishing up before every guest has arrived, unless it’s a funeral or a wedding. My aunt likes any and all compliments for her cooking to come to her all at once instead of in dribs and drabs.

**NOTE: ...like Ayra Stark...: A character in the fantasy book A Song of Ice and Fire who trains to be an assassin and creates a list of all the people she intends to kill.**

For the occasion my aunt has made all her best dishes. Beetroot, that well-loved celebrity on black family dinner tables is present. There's also bean and potato salads, savoury rice and ginger beer for my granddad. You'd swear it's a funeral. Thanks to the life lessons she's received from Oprah Winfrey, my aunt's guests do not eat in front of the TV. Even my grandfather is forced to abandon all rebelliousness and sits with everyone in the dining room. So, for over an hour we are left in the dark as no phones are allowed at table.

We might as well return to the difference between amabhulu and abelungu. As far as I know the foam caused by waves in the ocean is called 'umlungu' in proper isiXhosa. In the 1700s when white people were shipwrecked the Pondos (a Xhosa tribe) saw them coming from the sea resembling the tanned foam and thus named them abelungu. The terms possess different connotations. Amabhulu are regarded as harsh, slave-driving Afrikaners with a deep-rooted hatred for cultures and races distinctly different to theirs. On the other hand, Abelungu are Englishmen with a more humane disposition and are known to pay their workers promptly without any trouble. On payday my dad's workers refer to him as umlungu. It's regarded as a compliment. However, when he's upset, or when a Tender hasn't paid out on time and wages are delayed they call him ibhulu.

My male nurse uncle interrupts the meal with a message informing everyone that he's booked at a hotel in Summerstrand and will check in first before 'passing by' my aunt's place.

This extravagance upsets my grandparents.

"Unemali yodlala," observes my grandmother. \*

"Iphuma ngempundu. Uphakamile ngoku unyana wakho," granddad says accusingly to his wife. \*

"Imali iyabatshintsha abantu," notes my aunt. "Wayelala apha ke lomntu esoyiswa bubugqirha sezoba yi-nursi ngok." \*

"Unemali ayithatha phi na uSibabalo eyi-nursi nje?" enquires my dad. "Phofu abantwana bakhe ubahoyile?" \*

"Ngendingathethi ke mna ndinguwe," my grandmother intercedes. "Umlibele uZanele?"\* My grandmother's superpower is the ability to bring everyone in the family to their knees. She simply doesn't allow hypocrisy or anyone to forget their own skeletons when we're gossiping about someone who's not in the room. Zanele is possibly my father's biggest skeleton. She is barely spoken about, but Zanele is my half-sister. She stays somewhere in the township; we don't move in the same circles, so I never see her. I probably wouldn't know her if she bumped into me at the mall. Zanele is the reason my mother committed suicide. From what I hear, her life is in shambles.

**NOTE: unemali yodlala: he's got money to play with**

**iphuma ngempundu...wakho: It's coming out of his ass. Your son is high minded now**

**imali... abantu. Wayelala...ngok: Money changes people. He used to sleep here when he was struggling, studying medicine and now he's turned out to be a simple nurse.**

**Unemali ... nje? : Just where does Sibabalo get all this money, he's a simple nurse? And what of his children, is he caring for them?**

**Ngendingathethi ...ndinguwe. Umlibele uZanele? I wouldn't talk if I were you. Have you forgotten Zanele?**

## Zanele.

I want a new life like I need the air I breathe. Come to me my new, wonderful life. I know you are somewhere. I want to be independent like a white person. I want to be independent like nothing. When I think of the birds in the sky, free to go where they want, not worrying about cost, eating what they want, where they want. I think how wonderful it would be to be like that, to be like a bird flying where I wish, when I wish.

But I'm stuck in my Auntie's shack with stale bread for supper and pap in the morning. I've never even been to the beach when all the township kids cram each other like sheep in a van on the first of January. I'm never allowed to go.

"Zanele you are motherless and fatherless," my Auntie has always said to me. "Girls like you with round thighs are so unlucky. If you get raped at the beach, no one is going to search for you when you are taken and no one is going to feel sorry for you if you get raped."

But Nomsa and Vuyokazi from next door have bigger hips than me but still they get to cram in the van.

So, I sit and wait for all the happy children to come back to tell me about the wonderful time they had at the beach. Deep inside me I wish one of them would get lost or even drown. That way the trips to the beach on the back of a van would stop and we all can be hopeless together. If I could just get away from my life or exchange with someone else. God! I could be the child of a teacher or a policeman and eat meat every day for supper, corn flakes for breakfast and no more mealie meal. Everyday mealie meal this, mealie meal that. If I was somewhere else there'd be no mealie meal at all, I'd wear pretty clothes and new shoes with no holes all the time, not just when somebody died.

Oh and school. I almost forgot school. God, but that Maths doesn't sound like it would want to be a friend of mine. That Maths sounds like it is made for white people and wants blacks to stay forever in the shacks. Plus, there is Yvonne. Just because Yvonne's mother has a shebeen Yvonne thinks she is the princess of the school. I will never forgive her for that time she made fun of me because I use toilet paper instead of real pads.

More than anything I want to be out of the shacks. Everything smells like toilet, everywhere is the smell of the toilet and pee. You can't run away from that smell. More than that I want a boyfriend, more than I want nice clothes, even more than I want real parents, and more than I want to eat at Spur, I want to be out of the shacks where it stinks.

I am not afraid to give up that thing between my legs for that life that I want. Even though my Auntie says I must not open my legs for anyone, especially the men in the taxi rank where she sends me every day to sell her chips and sweets. But if there is a man who wants it, and that man can give me a better life, I will open my legs for him non-stop. All the girls do it these days. I will open them again and again and again so I can also get my Brazilian hair, nice spray, I will eat at Spur and use the Uber whenever.

But what man can want me when my own father thinks I am a waste? Thinking about my father and my dead mother makes my heart blast like a bomb into a thousand and one pieces. Somewhere in this PE I know my father is driving a nice car and lives in a white area because my Auntie says that's what my mother told her on her dying bed, "Ngumntu onemali, nomfazi. Ndizofa nalo igama lakhe." \*

Sometimes I think about leaving my Auntie and the shack to go and look for him but where would I even start?

I am in love with someone that does not even know I am a person. At the taxi rank I see maybe a billion people every day but this one man makes the world stop when he passes by me. He has all his teeth and they are white as if he washes them with jik. Sometimes I get close to him, he smells like Woolworths. He is the food of my life; I just want to tell him that he is my KFC, my bacon and egg, my beetroot and my Ultra Mel.

In the early evenings, maybe just before five, when the sun is doing that change from golden to orange, he comes through the rank on his way home. He has the walk of a man that knows things and his pants sit so right on him. You can tell his clothes are not handed down to him. But he never buys any of my things. Even when I stand right at the taxi door selling my things, he never looks at me. Just always on his phone as if the people around him, people like me are not even there.

"Ten-rand Score, two rand Nik-Naks, fifty-cent Chappies," I say. But nothing. He does not even check to see if I'm breathing properly and his taxi fills up before God has answered my prayers of making him thirsty so he can buy a can of Score from me.

His name is Sizwe. The other day he was sitting in the front seat waiting for the taxi to fill up and his phone rang and he said, "Sizwe hello," just when I was selling some Chappies to a lady in the back seat. I filled up with heat like a primer stove. I felt like I knew one more thing about him. It was like finding a treasure and my hope got bigger that I would find out another thing about him that was marvellous. His life looks marvellous and I want him to rain all over me.

When I get home in the evening, I am a mess because of Sizwe. I make a plan of speaking to the My Friend\* who has a shop so he can get me on Facebook on his phone. He lets all the girls with big thighs use his phone when they don't have airtime. He is not a bad man because there are no stories of him touching girls' bums or doing something that would make the community chase him about and beat him up. Usually people who touch girls when and where girls don't want to be touched are chased and beaten up in our township, especially if they are from Africa. I carry on being a mess and I don't hear when my Auntie asks me to explain something about The Bold and the Beautiful because my thoughts are on Sizwe and the fact that I cannot find a trace of the right Sizwe on Facebook. But I do not throw away my hope.

**NOTE: Ngumntu onemali, nomfazi. Ndizofa nalo igama lakhe: He's rich and married. I'll take his name with me to the grave.**

The days pass on and I make a plan of bumping into him at the taxi rank so that he is forced to talk to me. I do it on Friday because I notice on Fridays he is cool and not in a rush when he is going home. He likes black and navy shirts and they sit nice on him as if he is going to take pictures for a catalogue. I bump into Sizwe and I drop my box of goods all over the spot so that it will take some time to pick everything up. I scream just enough to get people to look and know that he has done something wrong but not loud enough to make people think he is a danger to me. The taxi drivers watch on and laugh at me when I bend down to pick up everything one by one and they call me stupid. I think to myself it is so lucky that they are laughing because it will work in my favour. He will now have to prove what kind of a man he is because everyone is watching. Sure enough Sizwe bends down also and starts picking up the Nik-Naks. He doesn't say any words to me but we are so close I can smell his spray because it is steaming off his chest. He smells like someone who would come from the rainbow. Fresh. He is shaping up a nice beard under his smooth cheeks. He is like a plate of food to me. At last everything is picked up and he is settled in the taxi waiting for it to fill up. When I do my rounds again he calls me and asks for a can of Score. I keep the Score in a cooler box I leave at a clean corner at the rank, so I dash back to get him the coldest can. As I dash back to my cooler box I know my bum is doing the work I need it to be doing if he is watching me from the back. It goes 'June, July, June, July.'

He pays me with a hundred rand and tells me to keep the change. He says he is sorry for the trouble he caused me just now. He smiles at me in that way men smile at you when they know you want them and I do my best to keep my breathing and face from saying too much about what is going on in my heart, body and soul.

I am at a far corner when his taxi drives off and I swear on my dead mother's grave I see Sizwe looking back at me through the window and he winks.

## Where we keep our wounds.

### Vuyo

Noma lives through the family meeting unscathed and the spotlight is quickly diverted to another mystical member of the clan; my male nurse uncle.

I have countless memories of my male nurse uncle tickling me years ago. And bathing me. I was always happy and laughing when I was with him. I remember something developing inside his tracksuit once while we were watching Home Alone together. I got so curious about the developing thing as it peaked and twitched slowly I thought of those snakes that dance their way up out of a basket, coerced by the sound of a flute. Of course, there was no flute playing, just him and me sitting nonchalantly on the sofa watching a movie we'd watched two or three times before. At that time, I had no experience of watching another man's penis harden or what it did once it had hardened. Back then I was blank. I poked at it as it took on a carrot-like shape, then I quickly pulled my hand away as if retreating from a hot stove. I waited for his rebuke. Silence.

I searched his face for a reprimand or a signal that I had crossed a boundary, but he just continued staring at Macaulay Culkin on the television screen. I knew full well that I had crossed a line and done something wrong but he felt so warm and his breathing changed and I too felt loved and warm. I moved my hand slowly up towards his groin giving him ample time to stop me but he said nothing. I ran my small fingers across the enlarged hump on the tracksuit and he watched my hand silently. I squeezed the length of it and he exhaled as I did. I have never forgotten the way his breath left his nostrils just then, as if I had saved his life. I felt like a firework as I moved my hand away again, "I'm sorry," I said.

"Why?" he asked gently. "You've done nothing wrong."

I fell so completely in love with him in that moment. I felt validated and secure he would love me forever too.

Later that week I overheard my father and my aunt talking about how my uncle had taken a bus to Cape Town. Six years passed before I saw him again.

My male nurse uncle arrives at my aunt's place while there's load-shedding and everyone is playing Crazy Eights under intense candlelight on the dining room table. As usual my granddad has isolated himself in a dark corner because his father used to say that playing cards in the house brings bankruptcy and misfortune to a family. Unfortunately for my granddad, his wife is addicted to playing cards. She has just won all three rounds of Rummy and they are now in the throes of Crazy Eights which isn't her favourite game, but she is not one to shy away from a challenge.

To ingratiate himself my male nurse uncle has brought a bottle of whiskey for my granddad and a warm woollen jersey for my grandmother. The gifts are welcomed enthusiastically but when my aunt notices there is nothing for her she asks, "Abantwana bakho?" \*

He retaliates by ignoring the plate of food she places in front of him and Noma is eventually directed to take it back to the microwave. They know just how to cut at each other, like all siblings do.

**NOTE: Abantwana bakho? : Your children?**

As the whiskey is being opened my male nurse uncle announces that he dreamt of Nomonde; their sibling who died in '98.

My aunt says, "Yesu!"\* and braces herself for the details of the dream.

My uncle explains that in the dream Nomonde asked him for water and something to eat. A silence incarcerates the house. Then my grandmother drops her playing cards to the floor and places her hands over her face, crying out her dead daughter's name.

"Zange simenzele nto kaloku,"\* says my aunt.

My grandmother weeps harder.

Granddad hushes her, saying the neighbours will hear and will think she is being beaten up or someone has died.

After calming herself, grandmother instructs granddad to call out all the clan names and to assure the ancestors that the family has heard Nomonde's request. My father puts on his coat as a sign of respect and rises to his feet. He then proceeds to engage the ancestors.

"Ndinqula ooSkhomo, ooZulu, ooTshangisa, ooRudulu, ooMhlatyana, amaNgwevu..."\*

"Camagu!"\* exclaims the family in unison.

There is always something reassuring about the way my granddad calls on the ancestors. It makes one feel that the long-gone members of the clan will magically appear in the room and whisper that week's lotto jackpot numbers and we will be set for life. But my dad is giving my male nurse uncle a suspicious look which my male nurse uncle ignores.

My dad wonders out loud where the money for a cow and all the other necessary preparations will come from at such short notice.

"I have twenty thou right now," says my male nurse uncle in a confident manner that presents him in a new light to those present. "I'm thinking twelve thousand for the cow max. Eight thou for everything else," he proposes with the air of a man who knows no financial constraints. "Maybe people can contribute a thousand each."

"A thousand?" my father blurts out as if contributing a thousand rand would leave him bankrupt. Knowing him, he is secretly annoyed that his younger brother is dictating terms on a critical family affair.

"Nam ndizolikhupha iwaka," declares my grandfather. "Wenza nje ngendoda nyana." \*

With those words the matter is settled. The family is doing 'umsebenzi' next weekend.

"Uxolweni," Nomaqhawe disrupts. "Nathi singabatshana nabazukulwana siyakhupa?"\*

Nomaqhawe stings the room with the question and she is darted at with questioning looks.

Her mother says, "Zintsikelelo kuni ezi mntanam. Wonke umntu kufenaka esebenzile."\*

**NOTE: Yesu: Jesus**

**Zange...kaloku: We've never done anything for her (in a traditional/cultural context)**

**Ndinqula: I call up... ooSkomo... amaNgwevu: Clan names**

**Camagu: A verbal acknowledgement when communicating with the ancestors**

**Nam...iwaka. Wenza ... nyana: I'll also contribute a thousand. You're acting like a man son.**

**Umsebenzi: A traditional ceremony**

**Uxolweni: Excuse me... Nathi...siyakhupa?: Are the nieces, nephews and grandchildren expected to contribute too?**

**Zintsikelelo...esebenzile: These are blessings to you my child. Everyone must play their role.**

“My dear, there is a lot you must learn about your culture,” my granddad begins in English. My grandfather was a Royal reader. He was taught how to read and write English by missionaries from Britain when he was still in his teens, so his English is close to perfect. “We are Xhosa people,” he explains. “As such when our relatives die we are left with the duty of ushering their souls into the next life so that their spirits might settle nicely with the existing ancestors.”

“SisXhosa eso...”\* adds my grandmother.

“Each one of us in this room will eventually die and it will be expected that a ceremony like the one we are talking about is conducted. In some cases, the dead visit the living through dreams, and they make requests. It is our custom to adhere to those dreams by conducting a traditional ceremony. It is something we hold as a belief and deserves our respect.”

“So it’s not just about luck and trying to get blessings?”

“No my dear. Our culture and custom is the basis of our identity as Xhosa people. It allows us to have a point of reference, a lineage. We have spiritual ancestors which we call upon in our times of success as well as our time of distress. We do this by sacrificing what we deem valuable and what we think is appropriate for the dignity of those who have passed on. Like Abel did for the Lord in the Old Testament. Even when *I* am dead, a ceremony of this nature must be done, and for your mother as well. Even *you*, should you die tomorrow we would be obligated to slaughter a goat for you too as you would be entering in the realm of the ancestors. That is what we believe. It is how we keep those who have died in our memories.”

“Like wounds that will not heal,” whispers my grandmother.

### **Zanele sets her sights**

Too bad I must cheat my Auntie of her grant money this month. I have my own SASSA card and I get my own grant money, but if I want to afford the floral dress I saw at ACKERMANS for three ninety-nine and the soft heel pump I saw at JET for four ninety-nine, I must be a thief just for once. Lucky for me my Auntie is losing her memory year by year and if I tell her that a thing happened like A-B-C she will remember it just as I said it happened. She never says, “Zanele are you sure? Because I remember X-Y-Z.” She just believes me. I tell her that she promised to buy me something beautiful because I have been a good girl since I am not running around getting pregnant like some of the girls in the township.

I need to look beautiful because Sizwe has invited me over to his church. He is a big somebody at his church, Jesus Christ Dominion Church.

There is so much that I need to fix about myself if I want to catch and keep a man like Sizwe. I spend the day at the Zimbabwean hair salon getting a weave for one sixty. I did not plan to splash it all over but I am getting questions about where I am going and I tell the ladies that I have found a boyfriend and I am going to church with him. The ladies in the salon are in shock because I am not known as a girl who gets chased by men. They ask me if he is older and I say yes he is older and mature and because I know the news will fly out and reach the whole township I tell them that they must not be surprised if I get married before the end of the year. I shut their mouths and I feel powerful. Like a real woman, and as I do I fall more in love with Sizwe.

**NOTE: SisXhosa eso: That is the Xhosa way**

Sizwe told me to get to the church early, just before seven so I can help him with some things. I am used to waking up early, so I float away in my new soft pump heels to Jesus Christ Dominion. I've put on extra Vaseline to fight against the chill of the morning. It is a sleeveless dress and I am praying for the sun to dance over the sky as it is known to do so I can be the lady Sizwe wants.

The church is quiet when I get there and he is in the building alone.

"You love me, don't you Zanele?" he says in a rush.

As much as I see him standing in front of me, I don't feel him. He is here but not here all at the same time.

"Yes," I tell him. "I love you with my whole heart."

Will he ask me to marry him so quickly into things? I ask myself. Will Auntie let me marry at fifteen? If it means a brick house how can she say no?

"Are you going to keep my secrets?"

His skin is so soft and his perfume swims through the space between us. How can I be this lucky to get a man so higher up than me?

Some keys are jiggling around his neck and I follow him into the lonely church hall like a mouse hoping for cheese.

I don't know where he is taking me, maybe he needs help with some church things in a back room. If he wants me to get baptised, I will do it even if I don't know the Bible that much. I will learn, he will teach me. He will teach me anything he wants to teach me, and I will be good at everything he teaches me.

We go in the church bathrooms; they are tiled and pretty and they smell fresh and clean. I wonder what it is he could want me to do in the bathroom but he turns around and faces me saying, "You mustn't worry we are alone in the church. People start arriving around eight."

He is brushing his polony as he says this, and I can see the shape of it.

So quick? I ask myself. He has not even told me he loves me back. But I know he will say it later when he asks me to go stay with him in the suburbs.

"Take off that stupid dress and lay on the floor."

I stop feeling beautiful, but I want to please him, so I take the dress off slowly and lay down. The floor is cold and hard. His pants are by his feet with his underpants and his polony is pointing at me as if I did something wrong. He farts once and I think maybe it is a mistake, but he farts again, and he pushes it out by force again and again. I am confused by Sizwe's love for me because he is not treating me the way Ridge treats Brooke but still, I am making him hard and he is ready to sex me.

"Finger yourself," he says. He is standing over me, so I do what he says.

He squats down and I think he is going to sit on my stomach, so I quickly close my eyes and his hand quickly covers my mouth. I want to show him that I am strong and can handle anything, so I do not scream but my eyes stay closed. He does not sit on my stomach, but he is above me, squatting. I hear him pushing and making that sound you make when you are constipated on the toilet. He is pushing and moaning, making different sounds as if he is enjoying himself so I freeze on the floor letting him finish what he is doing. But what is he doing?

He will treat me right later I promise myself. He pushes harder than before and suddenly I feel a warm drop on my stomach. I stop fingering and I open my eyes. I see his kaka on my stomach and his face is so pink with happiness as if he has just won the lotto. Quickly he gets up and pushes up my legs. His kaka rolls slowly like mud on me and he smiles watching it. He is holding me carefully, so the kaka doesn't fall off me. I am not slender, so he does not struggle with keeping it safe. Without a condom he sticks his polony into me. I count one, two, three, four, five then he finishes making an ugly face. The smell of the kaka reaches my nose and it reminds me of where I stay, the shacks and the bad smell. I think to myself, I will never escape my life. How I wish the floor could just swallow me right then and there.

He finishes everything then he controls his breathing. Quickly his pants are back on, the zip is closed, and he looks like a Christian again.

He pulls out two fifty Rand notes from his back pocket and throws them at me saying, "Clean yourself and go." When he is by the door he says, "No one will believe you if you talk about this. And I will say you are a liar."

I stay on the floor for some time thinking how it would have been if I'd stayed with my Auntie making mealie meal porridge.

Will this be my life? A rotten life where everything is kaka. Can I not have nice memories of times I can look at and be happy? I have nothing nice to tell about my family, my history or even myself. All I have is scars and kaka.

When I get home I wash. A few hours later I wash again. In the morning I wash again but still I cannot get the smell of Sizwe's kaka out of my skin so I wash for a second time and my Auntie shouts me for wasting soap.

## Missing Pieces

A company is installing new intercoms at work. The guy comes into my classroom while I am marking Grade 11 essays after all the kids have gone home.

“Bendicimba akho bantu,” \* he says hesitating by the door.

I gesture him inward, trying to place his rural accent. Transkei or Mthatha I guess, picturing him herding some sheep before fate brought him to the fast-paced life of intercom installation in PE. He is tall and dark; worthy of a few moments of attention.

His ladder is quickly up and against my chalkboard. His manner is one of careful respect, I think about becoming his friend just to fix him and teach him how to break all the rules his parents taught him. He ascends to fiddle with the old device on the top wall. His physique is evidence of a healthy gym routine, naturally I ogle him for a few seconds. He is possibly in his late twenties. I strain my nostrils inhaling the air in front of me, trying to get a whiff of his scent. I wonder at the taste of his armpits, the hairs hibernating there, the mustiness of his butt crack and his sweaty toes after a long day’s work. I crave him instantly. I reach for my phone and speed through my gallery. I press play on one of my favourite porn clips and put the volume on high. The clapping sound of flesh against flesh and male moans erupt through the speaker.

He turns to look at me and finds my eyes displaying that ‘sex with you is all I have on my mind right now’ look. I let the two-minute clip play till a climax is reached.

There is a threshold moment when a homosexual declares himself to being on the prowl amongst or in the vicinity of heterosexual men. Experience allows one to discern the best move when in that moment. Whether you pause or accelerate, you will be perceived as an alien. An extra-terrestrial that is a danger to a heterosexual status quo. This is what I am in my classroom as the attractive, young guy on the ladder studies my gaze and the tongue now sliding across my upper lip. I have been here a thousand times, in this scenario where I am opening the door to a world outside of the heterosexual ordinary and I am thrilled by the thought of being a shepherd or a danger. The idea of disrupting a heterosexual man who considers himself secure in his heterosexuality and masculine boundaries only to discover me, a fellow black man, to be a contrast or in fact a predator. Of course, he could just punch me in the face and report me to the Principal, even that thought thrills me.

All is on the table now. He is alarmed, his demeanour is changing, he is visibly performing multiple calculations in his mind and we continue staring at each other like the villain and the hero in a Western showdown.

“Awwh Teach? Yintoni ngok?” \* there’s a forced sternness in his tone, an effort to reinforce his heterosexual stance.

I strike.

“Ndicinga ngobumandi bepipi. Andiyazi ndingathini ndiyifuna ngoku. Ndiyatshiseka.” \*

**NOTE: Bendicimba akho bantu: I thought there wasn’t people**

**Awwh Teach? Yintoni ngok?: ‘Exclamation Teacher? What now?’**

**Ndicinga ...bepipi. Andiyazi...ngoku. Ndiyatshiseka: I’m thinking of the joys of dick. I don’t know what to do with myself I want it right now. I’m burning for it.**

His expression is of someone approaching a whirlwind. I smile at him one last time then I return to my marking. Silence reigns for a moment. He fidgets on the ladder, but I do not look up. He drops one of his tools, and I hear him descending to the floor, still I do not lift my head.

“Ukuba...?” \* he says with a tremble.

I look at him with a warmed-up face.

“Ukuba ndiyakwazi ukunika, ndingafumana ntoni mna?” \* he is staring at a spot on the chalkboard. I pull out my wallet. I have three hundred rand notes I was saving for petrol. I place one of them on the desk in front of me and he approaches. He picks it up and folds it into his back pocket. I move like a rabbit off my chair, quick but graceful.

There is a smell of butterscotch lotion on his testicles and his bushy pubic hairs tickle my lips and chin. He looks down at me, his eyes widening, and an O shape forms on his lips. I slurp my saliva all over his dick, but it is not big enough for me to gag on. Beggars cannot be choosers my mother used to say so I look on the bright side of how easy it will be to receive it anally. After grunting like a pig, he pulls my hand away as I throb my thumb up his butt hole. I am quickly off the floor, I spit on my fingers to wet my hole.

“Kawuleza ke,” \* I say gripping the edges of my desk. Through the window I see the sports field where I was watching some boys play soccer earlier.

He enters me and quickly makes my ass clap against himself. I hardly flinch, it is the perfect size I whisper to him and I demand that he goes harder. He hammers at me with a fixed sense of determination like a woodpecker knocking against a tree. He holds me by the neck and brings his mouth to my ear. His tongue finds it necessary to investigate the inner workings of my lobe and suddenly it is like I am listening to a complicated alien or worm language as his tongue wiggles in my ear.

I giggle and he asks me if I’m feeling it, if it’s nice. I’ve found there’s less admin when you lie to men about their sexual prowess. Sexually men crave validation. They need to know that they have conquered the weaker partner; the one who has been penetrated. They base their manhood on this ideal of conquering so they can weigh themselves up against their peers secretly or even publicly. Men feel victorious by devouring you, by ejaculating in you, but they hardly ever consider that *they* are the ones that have been conquered. They are the ones that have been brought to *their* knees, - figuratively speaking, as they have been made to surrender to *their* weaknesses or rather to the alien they had initially resolved to defeat. It is to *my* power that he has succumbed and if he were to think about it, *he* is an alien to himself and the world he will return to after this quickie.

“Inkhulu kamandi,” I puff him up. “Cama.” \*

“Ndicamele phakathi?” \*

“Ewe.”

**NOTE:** Ukuba...?: If? / Ukuba... ukunika, ndingafumana ntoni mna?: If I can give it to you, what’s in it for me?

**Kawuleza ke:** Make quick

**Inkhulu kamandi:** It’s nice and big/ Cama: Come

**Ndicamele phakathi?:** Should I come inside?

**Ewe:** Yes

He finishes and rests on my back.

I am annoyed and tired of him now, but he is lingering like the uninvited flies in my aunt's kitchen when she's cooking red meat. I dress, reminding him that his supervisor could be on his way up the stairs any moment. His adrenalin has not yet settled, and the mind-boggling sensations of released inhibitions are still rushing through his veins.

"Hamba," I say nonchalantly. "Akhangenyezeke lento," \* I say warningly.

He collects his tools and as he leaves, I wonder why I still feel an emptiness when I believe I have just had another sexual success.

### **Zanele firms up her resolve.**

I woke up and my Auntie was crying. I did not ask why because I know it is that emptiness of life that sits on our shoulders telling us that we are not where we want to be and we will never be where we want to be. She was not crying from angry thoughts. It was from pain that she cried. Pain from too much thought. I know her pain that is on the inside that she does not show. That pain that reminds us that something in our lives is missing.

I left her to cry in peace and I cleaned the shack then I made some fat-cakes and tea. After we ate I told her that I have decided to start looking for my father.

**NOTE: Hamba: Go. / Akhangenyezeke lento: This never happened.**

## Online



I loathe these fucken family gatherings where there is a heightened sense of what a black man must be and how a black man must behave. I am incapable of slaughtering a goat, and I'm not ashamed to say that I don't know how to start a fire. Fuck all that. Being macho is not one of my main priorities and the skilful manoeuvring of a knife against a defenceless goat isn't going to get me the lotto or the life people seem to think these traditional ceremonies should bring.

I wish my best friend Wethu could be there. He has enough testosterone and bravado for the both of us and readily helps me out at my family gatherings.

Our English teacher used to compare me to a praying mantis; graceful and poised. Black men aren't supposed to be graceful and poised though.

When Wethu and I were in Matric together we popped one of my pimples so we could look at the pus under a microscope. I had the better pimples. He has always just been a dark-skinned bastard with a flat ass. We were the only blacks who did Biology on the Higher Grade that year so we felt we had a lot to prove. Of course, we didn't see anything. The pus was just there, and it was just pus, no tiny microorganisms moving about like you see in the movies. When we weren't trying hard to be smart, I was helping him with the girls and he was my body guard. Thinking about it now I don't know what I would be without Wethu. He's always been there for me, even when I went through that messy phase of dating girls.

←  **Wethu**  
last seen today at 19:40



People should never say never 18:42 ✓✓

I used to worry about my dick in a chicks rotten pussy 18:42 ✓✓

Funny i never worry about my dick in guy's hole. Lol 18:42 ✓✓

Lol 18:44

I'm worried about how I view sex.  
I would totally fuck a step brother of mine, if I had one and if he was willing... of course  
u know I've fucked a cousin 18:49 ✓✓

Am I sick 18:49 ✓✓

I'd fuck a uncle too 18:49 ✓✓

🤔🤔🤔🤔🤔.....ure not sick.....ur sexual desires are 18:51

I think I would go as young as 14 🤔🤔🤔 18:53 ✓✓

Some of these boys play rugby and they thick 🤔🤔 18:53 ✓✓

Nooo.....dont do that you'll get arrested 18:54

I would never. 🤔 But fuck I look 18:54 ✓✓

Yes we all do that....but ey the risk...under age sex can destroy a man 18:55

I know 18:56 ✓✓

A lot of high school boys approach me though. 18:56 ✓✓

A lot!!! 18:56 ✓✓

And then what do u say? 19:05

I flirt back. Yahoo but the boys from my freak Twitter are a problem 19:06 ✓✓

They want sex and they want it yesterday 19:06 ✓✓

I could never 19:06 ✓✓

🤔🤔🤔...I dont trust you 19:09

Lol sometimes I don't trust myself 19:09 ✓✓

Did I tell u abt the time I fucked someone at work? 19:10 ✓✓



**Wethu**

last seen today at 20:20



Dude the male nurse is back. He's financing the whole ceremony... I don't know how to play this... 🤔

19:53 ✓✓

No!!! No sex with your uncle. No flirting either.

19:54

But can't we get something out of this? 🍷🍺🍺🍹  
U coming right. Plus Slim Shady is also gonna be there. He owes me dick!  
HE OWES ME DICK!  
HE OWES ME DICK! 🍆🍆🍆🍆

19:59 ✓✓

Bro slow down. I might be busy Saturday. I feel like your sexual appetite is getting the best of you. 😅

20:15

Dude please 🙄  
What is this now?

20:15 ✓✓

Bro Slim Shady is your cousin. This craving of family still gets U hot? Hayi... I don't know how hey. I wanna say just do you. But I fear that's too dangerous

20:19

I am not as out of hand as Wethu makes me sound. In fact, I'd like to think I have great self-control.



I'm vers mna

U discreet or out?

02/09/18, 9:16 ✓



Discreet

02/09/18, 9:16

Cool

Show me something klk

02/09/18, 9:17 ✓



Im still a virgin in this

02/09/18, 9:17

Really

How old are u

02/09/18, 9:18 ✓

16



Im tight as a knot

02/09/18, 9:18

Yhoo I'm 31

02/09/18, 9:20 ✓



😁 umdala moc ....you've got experience

02/09/18, 9:20

Lol

Not really but yeah I've bn around

U comfortable with my age?

02/09/18, 9:22 ✓



Age is no big deal if you up for a tight hole 👍

02/09/18, 9:25

Lol

What grade u

02/09/18, 9:26 ✓



10

02/09/18, 9:28

You wanna fuck sometime?

02/09/18, 9:28 ✓

Sure wesi in this kida wheather 🍑



How about today

02/09/18, 9:30

Lol slowly babe

Pics first

02/09/18, 9:30 ✓



K

02/09/18, 9:51



02/09/18, 9:54

Mmmmmmmm

02/09/18, 9:54 ✓



And yours

So I just asked my bro about the age thing and he's like I shouldn't

02/09/18, 9:55 ✓

Cause of rape stuff neh

And under age

02/09/18, 9:56

Dude klk worse I'm a teacher

I got kids that age in my class

But eish U fine as fuck

That booty though

02/09/18, 9:57 ✓

Teacher 😂 i understand

It would be harmless fun njeh

02/09/18, 10:00

---

I know

02/09/18, 10:01 ✓



What use is it keho if sizothetha qha .....anyway can i ask you questions within this topic

02/09/18, 10:05

Ewe

02/09/18, 10:06 ✓



How to make sure the hole is clean for anal sex

02/09/18, 10:07

Syringe

'Cima'

It also helps u to take dick

Not just about being clean

02/09/18, 10:09 ✓

---



😂😂 cima. ..

Ohh hayke teacher it looks like you wont be teaching me anytime soon

02/09/18, 10:20

Xolo vha

02/09/18, 10:28 ✓



No prob just that.... 😬

02/09/18, 10:29

Yeah

02/09/18, 10:29 ✓



Have a good day 😄👍

02/09/18, 10:49

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I often find myself spending hours online, drowning in the boundless world of secret sex meetings and fantasy.

There is something brewing between my cousin Themba and me. I call him Slim Shady on account of his love for Eminem.

I got him drunk once and we had intercrural sex. I don't want him drunk this time and I don't want it intercrurally. I want deep, raw strokes. I just want him to wreck me until I faint. The irritating thing about Slim Shady is this damn slut he's impregnated. Now he's using words like 'family' and 'responsibilities'.

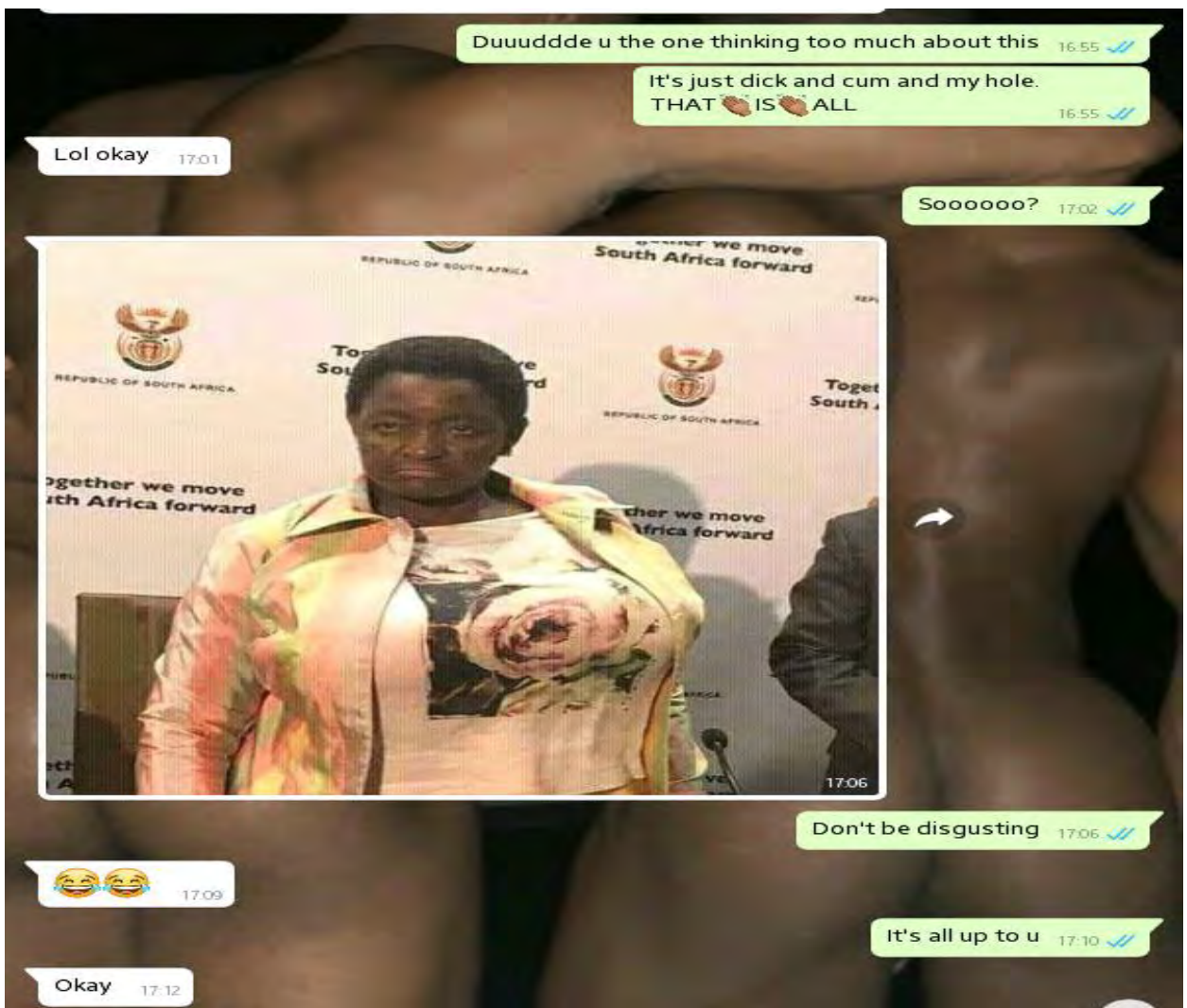
The fuck!

Although...

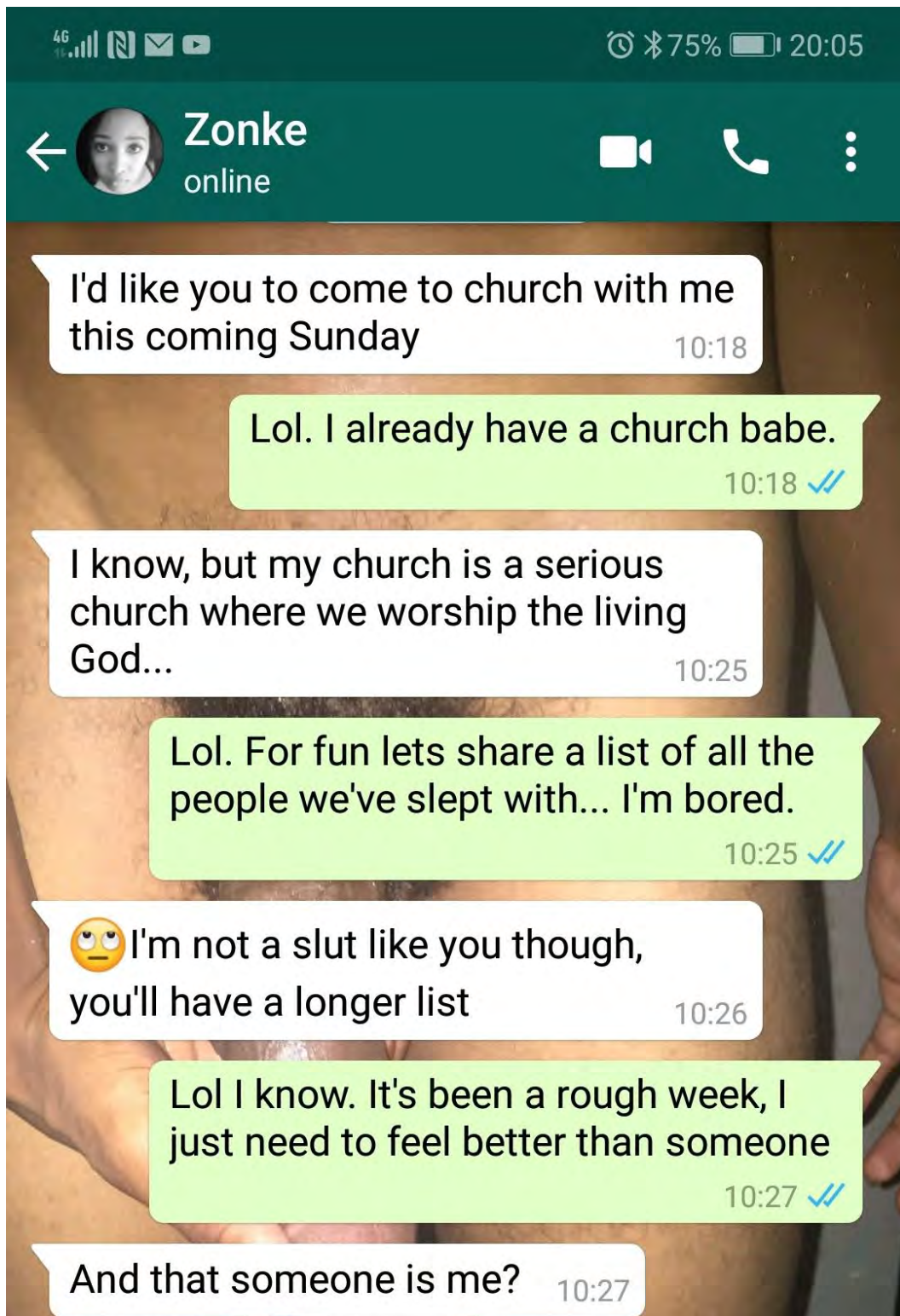


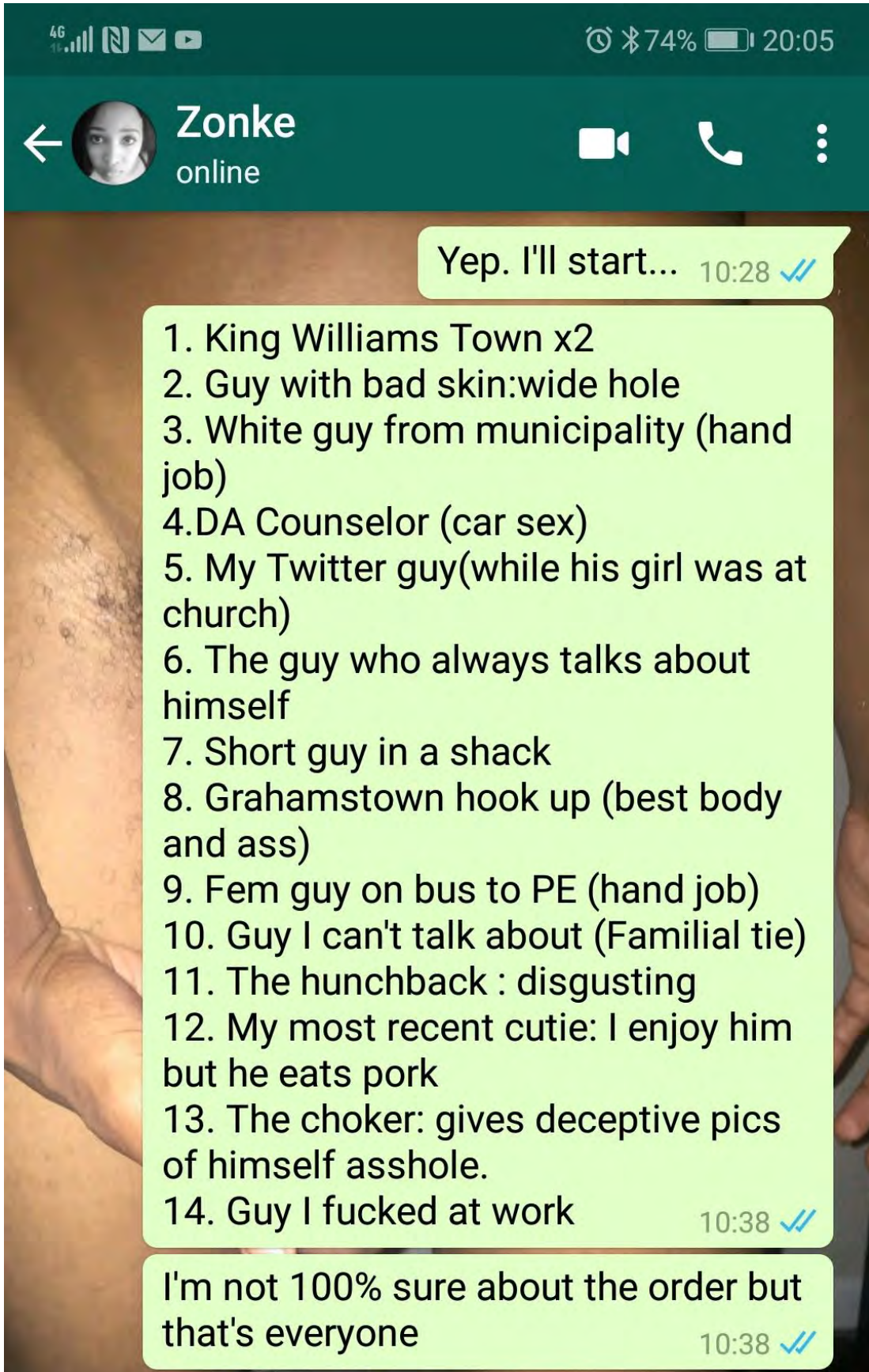






Another pain in the ass is my cousin Zonke, Slim Shady's twin. She's been pestering me about Jesus and becoming a Witness, but I deal with her accordingly.







I don't know how much she knows about me and her brother but I don't think Slim Shady would be that stupid.



The thing about being online is the risk of being found by just anybody. I thought I'd breeze through Nico, after all I don't fuck over fifties. But I couldn't ignore him.

## Shame.

It is the Saturday of the ceremony and you would swear the entire township has come through to participate in some festival. It is always like this during these occasions, people you've never seen before saunter through the yard expecting alcohol and meat.

As the hosting family, my cousins and I are expected to remain sober throughout the weekend so we might attend to little duties concerning the ceremony. Granddad has kicked things off by standing up in the makeshift kraal and calling upon the ancestors. After he speaks a few of the male elders from the neighbourhood stand up one by one and attest as witnesses to the ceremony. It's the custom.

It is customary for the cow to be named before it is slaughtered, so my grandmother has named it Sisikelele. \* There is always significance to the name given to a sacrifice. In this instance the family is requesting blessings.

My father is the intlabi in the family and he wields umkhonto.\* Like the rest of us in the kraal he is barefoot, his overalls rolled up to just above his ankles, and he circles the cow while the rest of us hold it down. His first duty is to coax Sisikelele to belt out loud cries, so he pokes at it with the tip of his mkhonto from the neck, right down to the anus as it lies on its side. It is of utmost importance that the cow obliges this process with a cry loud enough to be heard by all, as a sign that the ancestors have approved of the sacrifice. These are often nerve-racking moments for the cow does not surrender without a fight. She tosses and jolts her legs but through her frustration she remains mute as if fully aware of what's required of her. I am holding onto the cow's back leg and on account of a naughty thought that floats through my mind at that moment I lose my grip but I quickly get a hold of it within moments.

"Bamba, bamba, bamba. Uyindonda enjani? Uzakuwnikwa njani umkhonto?"\* my father reprimands me.

This is a loaded question. Firstly, to wield umkhonto is an honour given to the eldest male son in Xhosa families. It is an ambition that burns in many young Xhosa men's hearts but not mine.

"Xa ndifile uzothini?" \* he blasts. From his questioning I quickly gather that his ambition is for me to succeed him in the duty of being intlabi. "Jonga uThemba ubambile yena, nje ngendoda." \*

I glance at Slim Shady. His performance as a thoroughly masculine black male is Oscar calibre and my yearning to fuck him magnifies further. The irony here is that Sisikelele is poked with the steel blade from the neck down and conversely from the anus upwards on its underbelly to prompt it to make movements and sounds or cries. These anticipated cries will be the undisputed confirmation that the ancestors approve of and accept the sacrifice. Should Sisikelele not provide the sought-after signals, preferably a majestic 'MOOOOOOO!' then all will have been for nought.

**NOTE: Sisikelele: Bless us./ Inthabi: The one who wields the spear. / Umkhonto: The Spear (usually a family knife)**

**Bamba...umkhonto: Hold, hold, hold! What kind of man are you? How will the spear be handed down to you?**

**Xa ndifile uzothini?: What will you do when I'm dead? / Jonga...njengendoda: Look at Themba he's holding on like a man**

An unapproved sacrifice cannot be slaughtered, and the ceremony cannot continue. It is a scorching Saturday afternoon and we are at the height of Sisikelele's melodrama of refusing to play her expected role. Besides pulling her legs away from me she has made no sounds whatsoever. I glance over at the male nurse who is holding on for dear life to the cow's front left leg. His face tells the story of a man who placed a large fortune on a single racehorse, which is now showing signs of failing him at the last minute. An unsuccessful traditional ceremony brings shame on a Xhosa family, let alone the wasted expenditure. Township residents are excellent at raising eyebrows and asking questions when their neighbours seem to be failing at life. Who bought the cow? Was it clean money? Who is the intlabi? How pure is the intlabi? How pure is the family? Why wouldn't their ancestors accept their sacrifice? What shame have they committed?

A predicament such as the one Sisikelele is presenting now brings a black family to that all-important question, Bazathini abantu?

The thirty or forty people in the yard are enough to spread as a fresh scandal that the Gwadelas are unclean and their ancestors have rejected them. Already there are some murmurs developing and looks are being exchanged. No one likes the inconvenience of enduring long speeches under a hot sun in a makeshift kraal only to be cheated out of the opportunity of enjoying cow meat.

"Mcengeni. Bayacengwa abantu abaleleyo," \* suggests a grey-haired neighbour seated next to my panicky grandfather in the kraal.

I don't know what emboldens me to shout, "Thetha Mamngwevu, thetha makazi sus'phoxa. Size kuwe apha,"\* Then I recite the clan names ooSkhomo, ooZulu, ooRudulu. As I do so I feel an emotional rush I cannot describe. I am not happy, nor am I sad, but I have a mixture of anger and wanting or maybe needing...

We can stop there for a moment. I think we are stumbling on the fundamentals now.

No doctor. I'd like to continue please.

Sure, if you are comfortable.

...so as I recite the clan names, immediately afterwards the cow bellows like a maniac. It goes on for several seconds and the women start ululating and I watch my father exhaling a long wind.

"Kuthethe intwana yam," \* my father screams while concentrating on slitting Sisikelele's broad neck. A young boy is holding a basin at the cow's neck where her crimson blood settles. As an experienced intlabi my father's spear slices through the cow's neck so effortlessly that he is praised by the elders for not causing the cow too much pain. My impromptu plea with the cow and its immediate response has created the impression that the ancestors have listened to *me*, and I am suddenly the star of the moment. To add to it all my father is looking at me in a way I do not recognise.

NOTE: Mcengeni: Plead with her. / Bayacengwa abantu abaleleyo: You have to plead with the dead.

Thetha Mamngwevu...apha: Speak Mamngwevu, speak auntie. Don't disappoint us we're here for you.

Kuthethe intwana yam: It's *my* son that spoke!

There are ways we look at others, and sometimes a person can look at you, but you can feel that they do not see or acknowledge you. I never really felt my father acknowledging me growing up, but as he looks at me in the kraal, I feel he is telling me in a nonverbal way that he does love me. He restrains his quivering face by rinsing the blood off his spear in a pale of water prepared nearby just for the task. We do not make eye contact again for a while. Slim Shady taps my shoulder saying, “Uyindoda.” \*

My first instinct is to whisper back, “Ndiyindoda yakho.” \* But I reserve my normal habits to sustain this new leverage I seem to have gained in the kraal. I am seen. Not merely as an attachment to the family but as one of the men, so much so that my granddad declares the cow’s tongue will be prepared just for me. The delicacy is usually reserved for the patriarchs. Gasps from various corners in the yard magnify the honour I have just received and again someone somewhere says, “Yindoda kaloku.”\*

### **Zanele finds a trail**

My mother used to work at a fast food place owned by some Greeks. I have heard that they are still in business, so I put together some taxi fare and take a taxi all the way to Addo where the shop is. I am hoping and searching for a trace of my father. To me, a woman who has an affair with a rich man will talk about it with someone close to her, even if it is one person just like I almost did with Sizwe.

I get there and the Greek man’s hairs on his chest peak through his half open shirt.

“Yes, what you want?” he asks when I say I am not buying anything.

“I am Mavis’ child,” I say.

He does not look like he is trying to remember who Mavis is. Behind him in the back area of the shop where all the cooking is done there is a buzz of action and I see some women are busy frying and steaming food I cannot see. I imagine my mother as one of them.

“I am Zanele, Mavis’ child. She used to work here for you, but she died.” I say to him behind the till.

His face does not seem to be working hard at remembering who Mavis was. He lifts his shoulders and tells me he has customers.

I move to the side and slowly walk out of the shop. It is beginning to get windy outside and I am not dressed for the cold. I quickly look for a corner to hide myself, so I won’t be seen because I feel like crying. Just as I do, I hear someone calling my name, “Zanele!”

One of the women from the Greek man’s shop is following me. She is short and pear-shaped. A plastic apron is wrapped around her hips and a fish-net cap covers her almost grey hair.

**NOTE: Uyindoda: You are a man  
Ndiyindoda yakho: I am your man  
Yindoda kaloku: He is a man**

“Yhooo! Yhooo uyafana nomama wakho. Hayi maan ubekwa yintoni apha?” \* she asks with a look of happy surprise not like the Greek man.

“Ndibuzisa ngotata wam. Uyamazi mhlawumbi?” \*

“Yhooo akhomntu wayengamazi utata wakho kweliAddo. Wayesiskhulu.” \*

She looks me up and down while I am still wondering what she means about my father being a big man. Then she asks, “Wena, unenyanga ezingaphi?” \*

I am so stunned that I almost laugh. I tell her I’m not pregnant, I am only seventeen.

She looks at me and says nothing.

“Ndicela undixelele ngotata wam ba uyakwazi.” \*

The woman investigates space as if she is looking through the files of the past as she tells me the stories on my parents’ romance. I am shocked to hear that my father was a businessman, a contractor and his company built the school in Addo.

“Inoba imali yakhe ipakishene xa kungoku.” \*

She is not sure what my father’s name is, but she remembers my mother calling him Skhomo. His clan name. As we are talking we hear someone calling out, “Cynthia!”

“Sies nantsi lenja indibiza,” \* she says with a frown.

The Greek man is standing by the shop door, he is screaming at Cynthia about his customers and he says something about gossip. I lose focus because I am feeling a bit sick suddenly.

Cynthia tells me to not give up and that my father’s business was called Inkwenkwezi Projects. \* She remembers because he drove a white van with the name on the doors when he picked my mother up after work. At least it is a link, I tell myself.

On my way back to the taxi rank where I will catch a taxi back to PE, I start feeling worse than before. I decide to sit on the pavement just to get a bit of rest but as I do so I feel something rushing up from my stomach through my throat and I vomit all over the place. Jesus, I say to myself, I hope Sizwe didn’t give me something like AIDS.

It turns out I am pregnant after all. I am not the first girl of my age to get pregnant in the township but still I did not plan for a baby. Even so, I do not trust the Nigerians who offer abortions for seventy Rand in Korsten so I will not go and ask about it. There are too many stories of girls bleeding to death and some not having children again after they go there for abortions. As far as I can see, the first thing to do is to look for Sizwe. I may be young, but I am not so stupid that I will want a relationship with him now that I know the sex he likes. No. But still he must plan for his child. The next Sunday I go back to his church and I sit and listen as the Pastor tells the congregation about the power of giving money to the church and some people testify about not having debt anymore because they give money to the church.

**NOTE: Yhooo! ...apha? : Exclams! You look just like your mother. No man what brings you here?**

**Ndiyabuzisa...mhlawumbi? : I am asking about my father. Did you know him perhaps?**

**Yhooo...Wayesiskhulu: Exclams. There isn’t a person who didn’t know your dad in this Addo. He was a big shot.**

**Wena unenyanga ezingaphi? : And you, how far along are you?**

**Ndicela...uyakwazi: Please tell me about my father if you can.**

**Inoba...kungoku: His money has probably stacked up by now.**

**Sies...indibiza: Sies there’s that dog calling me.**

**Inkwenkwezi Projects: Star Projects**

But as the service goes on and on, I do not see Sizwe so afterwards I speak to one of the choir leaders about how well they were singing and they have lifted my spirits. This is not the truth but I want information so I will say anything. I tell her that I am hoping to get baptized soon and she gets happier at me. She frowns when I ask her about Sizwe. He was very nice to me the first time I visited the church I explain quickly. Then she tells me Sizwe's drama. Sizwe was the blockbuster of the church. The Pastor's favourite. But some weeks ago, he stole money from the church safe and has not been seen since. Some are saying he has gone back to KZN where he is from originally.

If Sizwe has stolen money from the church, he will never come back. I know this because people steal money from their stokvel groups all the time and then they disappear.

I think through my options on my way home and I decide to tell my Auntie that I was raped. Being known as a victim of rape is much better than being known as a slut and if I say I was raped no one will question me too much about the baby's father. And also, I cannot waste time searching for this baby's father when I am still looking for my own. When the baby grows up he will just have to catch up and look for his father on his own just like I am doing now.

### **Vuyo's naughty desires**

By eight o' clock my cousins, some other distant relatives and I officially start drinking. Of course we've had random and customary shots here and there throughout the day, but the ceremony has been declared a success by all present so the family will now await aunt Nomonde to negotiate with the rest of the ancestors blessings for all of us, especially the male nurse who spent a small fortune on everything.

We've collected ourselves together with five other unknowns from the neighbourhood in the back room where Slim Shady and I once did it intercrurally. No one besides Wethu, knows I've fucked my cousin, or rather, I'm in love with my cousin.

In between rushing everyone through our second bottle of Bombay, I am sharing my olive oil, onion, garlic and honey recipe for penis enlargement and the clever ones are saving the method on their phones as I explain it.

Someone starts singing a hymn and we all join in vigorously. We are bolder Christians when we are drunk, much to Zonke's disapproval. Zonke takes her job as a Jehovah's Witness seriously and has not had an ounce of alcohol throughout the ceremony on account of it. She has also made no secret about her dislike for homosexuals and her belief that homosexuals will burn in hell since they are not part of the hundred and forty four thousand that will eventually go into heaven. I leave the room for some ice in the main house when she starts preaching, just to avoid clashing with her because when I've had a few drinks I do not shy away from protesting against homophobia as I do when I'm sober. Outside I spot the male nurse heading towards the outside toilet. He has that hurried walk men have when they have been holding pee in longer than necessary. I pause and contemplate.

He will be alone in that dark toilet and it is a fair distance away from the house so no one will hear growls or moans and if we are quick it can be done in under ten minutes. Fearlessly I follow him, and I hear his urine splashing into the toilet bowl. As I am about to push the door open my father's voice thunders in the dark from a distance behind me, "Awuboni kukho umntu apho? Unxilile?"\*

I exaggerate my intoxication and cause myself to stumble and lean against a wall. From his position in the darkness my father is nothing but a phantom I see as a black silhouette. The toilet flushes and the male nurse emerges looking at me questioningly. They walk off into the house and leave me wondering if I will get to fuck anyone before going to bed.

I have managed to get some ice and we are halfway through the fourth and final bottle of Bombay. At this juncture I remind people of the sleeping arrangements. The girls will sleep in the lounge and amajita \* will share the room we are currently in. Everyone is at that stage of intoxication where they sleep through anything. Slim Shady and I will take out the spare mattresses from the garage once the elders start getting rid of the neighbourhood drunkards who refuse to leave on their own accord.

But as we continue drinking and singing the male nurse appears at the door. He is followed by two tipsy men talking about how good he would be as Councillor of the Ward and that if he wanted it, the position could be his in the next by-election.

"Makulalwe ngoku guys. Ababhuti bazakulala apha naniVuyo." \*

Fuck. Full on penetration with Slim Shady will be impossible, unless we share a mattress on the floor and do it sideways. I am growing anxious because it feels like all my plans for the night are being sabotaged. My prospective lover pretends not to care and indulges in his Castle Lite.

"IzaVuyo siyothatha into zolala," \* the male nurse commands.

I do not help him with the roll-up garage door because I'm drunk, I say to him and I want to save my strength for later on in case I should get lucky. He does not respond as he whisks the door up easily. The mattresses are stacked against the far back wall and to reach them we must wade through clutter and other items that are trash to some and treasures to my grandparents. I am proceeding inward when I feel his hand squeezing my butt. "Umdala ngoku," he breathes like a jackal cornering its prey.

Success at last. I partly dislike the fact that I am drunk in this very second, but I know fully that this moment would not occur had I been sober. In sex, or rather, in incest or any type of illegal sex where no trace of intercourse can be left out in the open, there are preconditions. Loss of sobriety is one of the many preconditions of man-to-man sex.

It is difficult to make out his intention, his emotion nor can I judge my own now. All I want is to be touched, to be fingered, to be choked, to rim, to suck dick, to be raped. His lips are...

Is rape a sexually arousing fantasy for you?

**NOTE:** Awuboni... Unxilile?: Can't you see there's someone in there? Are you drunk?

Amajita: The guys

Makulalwe...naniVuyo: It's bedtime now guys. The uncles will sleep in here with you guys Vuyo. /

IzaVuyo...: Come Vuyo lets go fetch the mattress. / Umdala ngoku: You're grown up now.

Well doctor when I say ‘raped’ I mean, I picture myself as an innocent, white rabbit that knows nothing at all about sex and my lover is a vicious carnivore of a man capable of bursting through my guts with his dick.

I see. That is interesting.

How doctor?

Well earlier in your previous sexual encounter you spoke quite vividly about, and I’m quoting you here, being *on the prowl, an extra-terrestrial, an alien*. You described yourself *as having power* over a man who was a virtual stranger. But when you speak of sex with your uncle you see yourself as a *white, innocent rabbit*. You wish to be raped. I find those two concepts inconsistent. Don’t you?

Are people not allowed to like different things at different times?

Absolutely. But what we are dealing with here is more than sex, it is a question of your identity. I don’t believe you understand your own sensitivities, thus you cannot honestly have an idea as to your own identity. Hence the need to live in a virtual world of ‘fake twitter’. This of course is all due to a large amount of trauma you have suppressed from your childhood.

Can I carry on?

Sure.

His lips are quickly on mine and his tongue manoeuvres so cavalierly in my mouth. We interweave our tongues and saliva in a dance, a festival of craziness, his hands on my butt, my nails running down his back. My grudge towards him does its usual repetitive leap towards the forefront of my mind but I silence it. I have him now, I tell myself I have him at last.

Until, “Nenzantoni?” \*

Ice water is suddenly poured on what feels like a lifetime of pleasure and all of a sudden the male nurse slaps me across the face and my feet lose their balance.

“Rubbish!” he lashes at me.

The slap has quickly sobered me up. My father is standing by the garage door and has possibly seen all. I have wondered at the moment when it is made blatantly clear to my father that I am an undisputed gay person. I have thought of the circumstances, the mood he’d be in and his possible reactions. I have not pictured him as a man who’d welcome the idea of a moffie as his only heir. But to have him in the centre of a melodrama between his younger brother and his son was not what I had ever imagined. To make things worse, the male nurse has clearly prepared himself for the eventuality of being discovered in this exact position.

NOTE: Nenzantoni?: What are you doing?

“Ndanditheni kuwe ngalento,” \* he explodes at me. “Sies,” he spits wiping his mouth. My legs, in fact my entire body feels like it is drowning in quicksand. I do not move, I cannot move. The male nurse is speaking fast, and I cannot make out every word. There is the mention of Cape Town and the more he speaks the more my father continues to look at me as one would probably look at an alien that has declared imminent invasion. He shuts his eyes and forcefully unfastens his belt, “Ndizokubetha ukake kwedini!” \*

The male nurse rushes to stop him pleadingly, reminding him of the ceremony and how unfavourable it would be if there was to be discord or violence when the family had just conducted a sacrifice to the ancestors.

I watch the belt slowly falling to the ground, but my father’s expression is still that of a man just recently bereaved.

He heaves desperately as they move away together leaving me alone in the dark garage and the voices or thoughts I am able to run away from when I am having sex rush at me with a violence I have not known before they highlight now more than ever my placelessness and the possibility of being unloved outcast and dying alone the voices or thoughts I don’t know what they are exactly are so vivid and sharp that they even take me back to the bathroom floor where I found my mother’s lifeless body years ago but I don’t like being in this particular memory so I resort to the only thing powerful enough to pull me away back to my sanity and that is the thought of a dick in my mouth or anywhere inside me it is the only comfort that works and I remember Slim Shady is probably getting ready to sleep

**NOTE: Ndanditheni kuwe ngalento? What have I said to you about this?  
Ndizakubetha ukake kwedini! : I’m going to beat the shit out of you boy!**

## Collective Black Confusion

The next morning my father has disappeared, and his cell phone is off. It is eventually assumed he has rushed off to one of his friends in the local council for a Tender or something business related. But the elders are wondering how, when it is a Sunday. The male nurse and I keep our mouths shut about the previous night's incident.

The responsibility of concluding the ceremony and the minor rituals connected with the sacrifice now rest on my grandfather's frail shoulders. He delegates and oversees everything from his bench in the kraal, so he has little complaints and moans only when he must get up and demonstrate how to do a particular thing. By midday all that's left to do is to burn Sisikelele's bones. Everything must burn, the old man commands from his seat.

We are in the process of clearing up the three-legged pots, chairs and everything else scattered in the yard when we hear female voices from the street approaching the house.

There is cursing and vulgar language and the two speakers are attracting a small crowd with their commotion. Soon two middle-aged women appear at our gate. I do not quickly recognise them, but they are followed by a much younger woman possibly in her twenties. Someone from the house, I think my aunt, gasps, "Pamela!"

Pamela was the male nurse's on-and-off-again girlfriend before he relocated to Cape Town all those years ago. For the longest time she was *persona non grata* in the Gwadela home as my grandparents believed she'd seduced him and in the horror of losing his innocence to a township whore, he absconded to Cape Town. Her entry now, into our family home is that of a vampire resolved to preying on the blood of innocents.

Her escorts spot the male nurse as he emerges from the front door.

"Size kuwe nja ndini! Uthini ngomntwana wakho?" \* shouts the first woman.

"Le kaka yendonda," \* affirms the second.

This is what I want. I uncover a longing in that moment. I want him humiliated. I want him to be held accountable for something or other. I want his glamour boy status to erode and the glimmer the family has affixed on him to disintegrate. His downfall now will be enough justice regardless of the context.

The insults to his manhood and credibility thunder through all of us like a tornado and my grandmother is heard mumbling with dread, "Thixo bazathini abantu?"

Here, my aunt intervenes with her own ferocious venom, "Not ekhaya! Not ekhaya!" \*

From my family's reaction I can tell that the main point of concern is perception, and the ideas that will sprout in people's minds about our family regarding a new scandal.

Quickly the two women are subdued and ushered inside where they can be concealed from the glare of nosey neighbours. Through the ensuing discourse, Pamela does not utter a word, nor does she lift her head to look anyone in the eye.

NOTE: Size kuwe nja ndini! Uthini ngomntwana wakho: We've come for you, you dog! What do you have to say about your child?

Lekaka yendoda: This shit of a man.

Not ekhaya: Not at my home

My cousins Noma, Zonke and I have huddled in the kitchen where we are preparing tea in absolute silence so as not to miss the finer details of the discussion in the lounge. We soon learn that the male nurse's claim of having paid damages was a lie. In fact, he has never even visited his child or made contact.

My grandfather however, is not so convinced that his son would be so negligent so he wonders out loud as to the true paternity of the child and subtly suggests that Pamela might not have been prudent as a young girl. Perhaps there are other men in the area to be spoken to other than his son, he says. I am placing the tray with the tea things on the table in front of them as he says this, and I throw my eyes over at Pamela. She wears her shame like a coat, and she shudders as if hot iron rods are being curled on her bare back. She is clearly not a young woman prone to devious machinations and the insinuations of sleeping around humiliate and anger her to tears. She is young but she is emotionally drained and the natural vigour of a twenty-something year old is depleted. Her tears rain down on her lap and the male nurse rescues her from what appears to be another verbal uppercut from my grandfather. The child is his he confirms, and he will pay damages and child support. His attitude is of extreme nonchalance, and he shrugs his shoulders as if he's long awaited inclusion in the child's upbringing. Nevertheless, Pamela's relatives are appeased, and from the kitchen we hear the teaspoons clattering against my grandmother's best tea set. This is a sign that the tension has been eased and a middle ground has been reached. Soon there is some moderate small talk and my grandfather has changed his tune. He says how cute the child must be and probably has the Skhomo good looks. I am summoned by my aunt to collect the teacups and I again note Pamela's expression. The light banter underway now and my uncle's financial commitment have done nothing to restore Pamela's dignity. But she is no position to voice her feelings or opinion and her inward turmoil is undermined further when her aunts commend the male nurse for his assurance.

As I walk back to the kitchen one of them says, "Wenza nje ngendoda." \*

My father returns at about four in the afternoon. I am in the kitchen making snacks when I hear his Hilux pulling up. We hear him calling for water to wash his hands. My grandmother is the first to ask if he is returning from the graveyard. Our culture is intricate and perhaps responsible for the collective black confusion that suffocates most progressive perspectives. It is custom to wash your hands before entering a home just after visiting a graveyard. At funerals a pail of water is placed at the gate. The ritual of washing hands symbolizes the washing away of death and the possible lingering of a dark cloud. By not washing one's hands, it is said that one leaves an open invitation to death in their family.

The elders are still sitting in the lounge discussing the recent visitors and how 'manly' my uncle was in accepting responsibility.

I am told to take a jug of water out to my dad. I cringe.

**NOTE: Wenza nhe ngendonda: You have acted like a man.**

Reluctantly, I take the necessary jug out as I have been commanded. On seeing me approach he frowns, and a fury flares up his expression. I reach him and push out the jug, assuming he will outstretch his hands to receive the water. I am centimetres away and I hear him seething like a bull provoked by a red flag. He continues staring at me while my guilty eyes linger, avoiding his; then, without saying a word, he wipes his hands on my T-Shirt and he spits on the ground. He then passes me, entering the yard with his hands unwashed. It is the clearest message I could ever receive. To my father, I am as good as dead.

After some questions from his parents my father tells everyone that he drove to my mother's grave because he is tormented by the fact that I am gay. At first there is silence, then my grandmother laughs at him saying he must still be drunk from the African beer he had the day before. My grandfather too does not believe his favourite grandson could be gay, so he chastises my father for suggesting such a disgusting notion. My cousins and I are again huddled in the kitchen but this time the atmosphere is different. We are not containing our laughter and eavesdropping eagerly as we did hours before. A new territory is being ventured into by the elders now and we are particularly concerned about their skills for traversing through it.

"Sistabane!" \* my father stamps the word firmly with an angry tone that cuts away at me. Noma is hugging me from behind, placing her chin on my shoulder. Zonke has her arms folded at her chest and is as readable as Morse Code to a chimpanzee.

The silent intervals from the lounge where they are all debating me speaks volumes about the collective confusion the announcement of my sexual orientation has caused.

When my father is asked as to the basis of his accusation the male nurse jumps in and confirms, "Hayi akhukho sinyanzelo ba icaciswe. Kodwa ke injalo into yalentwana."

In his own way, I immediately understand the male nurse's attempt at trying to conceal the details of the previous night. By doing so he shuts down any questions that might raise his name as possible link to me and my same-sex attraction.

"Inyala!" \* my grandmother bemoans, and the word feels like a fist into my belly.

"Le ntwana bendiyithembe kangaka!" notes my grandfather. "Sasimenzele nje imbeleko. Inoba yintoni ngoku? Izinyanya inoba zifuna ukusixelela ntoni?" \*

"Indonda efuna ukuba ngumfazi? Sizayithini lonto, sizakuyithetha njani nalapha ekuhlaleni? Thixo bazathini abantu?" \* continues my grandmother.

"Kuzakufuneka siyifunele intombi ngolahlobo lakudala," suggests my grandfather. "Ukhona nje wena uSathana otila ofuna ucaca. Awufumana amathanga entombi emnyulu, uzolunga." \*

"Skhomo ayijiki lentwana kulento ndijongile nje," \* says my father.

"OoSkhomo zange banyo into enjalo. Ndinoske ndife ukuba nizakuvuma esosimanga." \*

**NOTE: Sistabane: He's a faggot.**

**Hayi...yalentwana: No there's no need to go into details. But this is the truth about this boy.**

**Inyala: A disgrace.**

**Inoba...abantu? Maybe he wants to be a woman? How are we going to deal with that? How will we even face the community?**

**God what will people say?**

**Kuzakufuneka...uzolunga: We are going to have to find him a virgin like the old days. There's an evil spirit that wants to take over.**

**Once he gets the thighs of an innocent girl, he'll be fine.**

**Skhomo...nje: Skhomo the way I see it this boy isn't changing his mind.**

**OoSkhomo... abantu?: The Skhomo clan has never had such a thing. I'd rather die if you will allow such a strange thing.**

## The Doctor's Notes

Vuyo I am interested in your interpretation of the *silent intervals* as your family discussed you, and the *collective confusion* you mentioned.

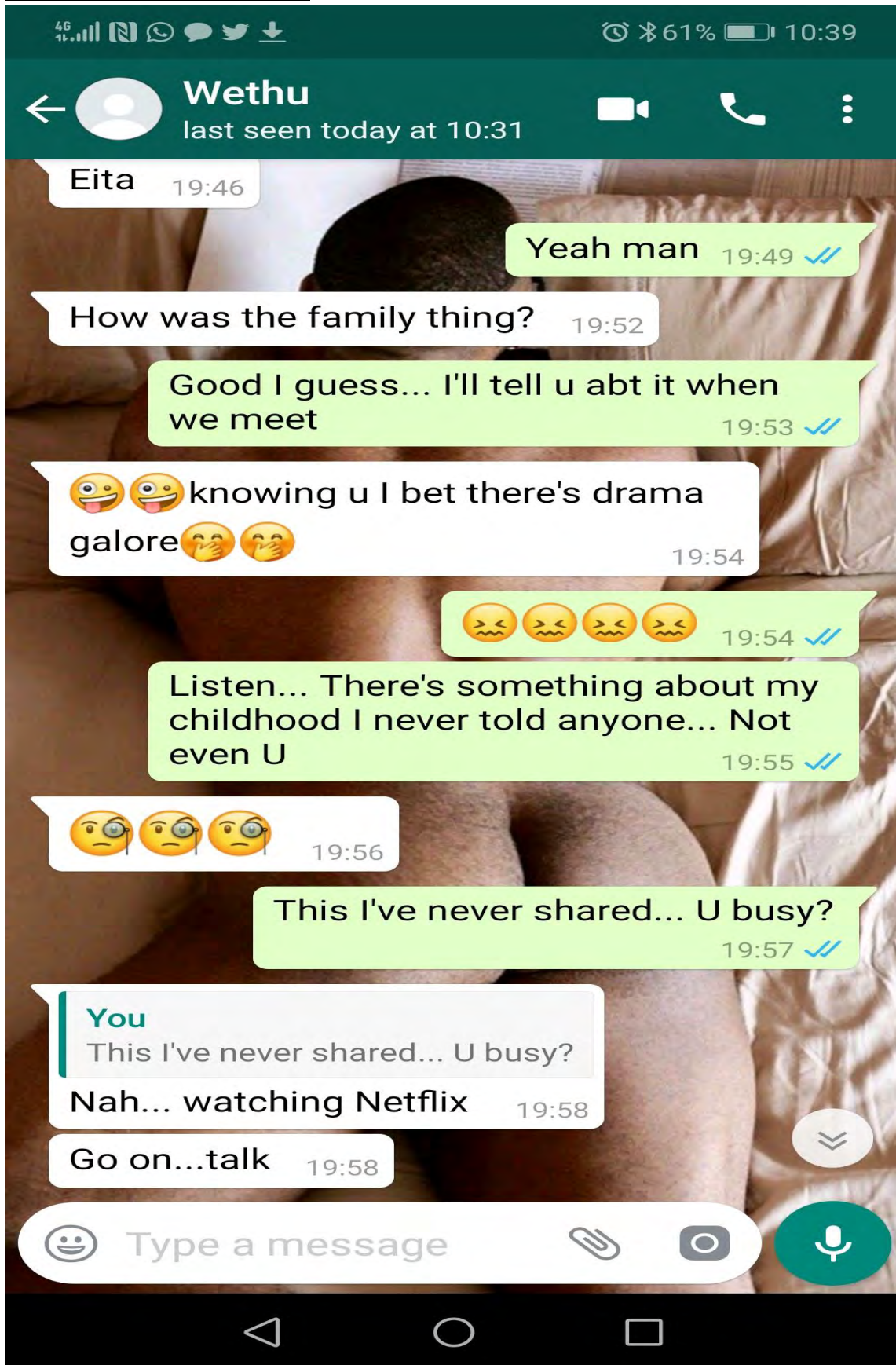
In the silence doctor, I heard and felt their disgust and shame, their hypocrisy for judging me because of my sexual orientation. Silence speaks louder than words. Sure, I've done crazy sexual things, but I've never placed the family name in jeopardy, unlike the male nurse who basically ignored the existence of his own child and went to Cape Town to lead another life. Generally, traditional blacks respond to gay people in their immediate families the same way. Gay black men are viewed as men who want to be women, we are traitors to patriarchy or the natural order of nature as God and the ancestors had intended. Yet the same men who believe this condone and justify child neglect, abuse and irresponsible masculine behaviour. With blacks, you can do anything, just don't be gay. We are confused about what is important, we value perception more than we value reality.

That is a truly profound outlook. But I wonder if we, you, could place the same amount of thought into your needs and obligations to yourself? What is the confusion within yourself that has led you to question yourself more than before?

Part Two:

The wind that's beginning to howl.

A friend always shows itself.





Wethu

last seen today at 10:31



After my mother died - killed herself - the male nurse stayed with my dad and me... He learnt to drive using my mom's car and shit and he would fetch me from school and all that... This one Sunday we went to the beach... It wasn't new year's coz it wasn't that busy. 20:00 ✓✓

Anyway we spent a few hours out and had fun at the beach, I swam and played in the sand and it was awesome. He was my hero coz he just made me so happy. 20:02 ✓✓

Anyway it was time to go home so he told me to go to the toilets to wash the sand off myself, he didn't want me to get sand all over the car. 20:03 ✓✓

Back then I was a bit shy and innocent still 20:07 ✓✓

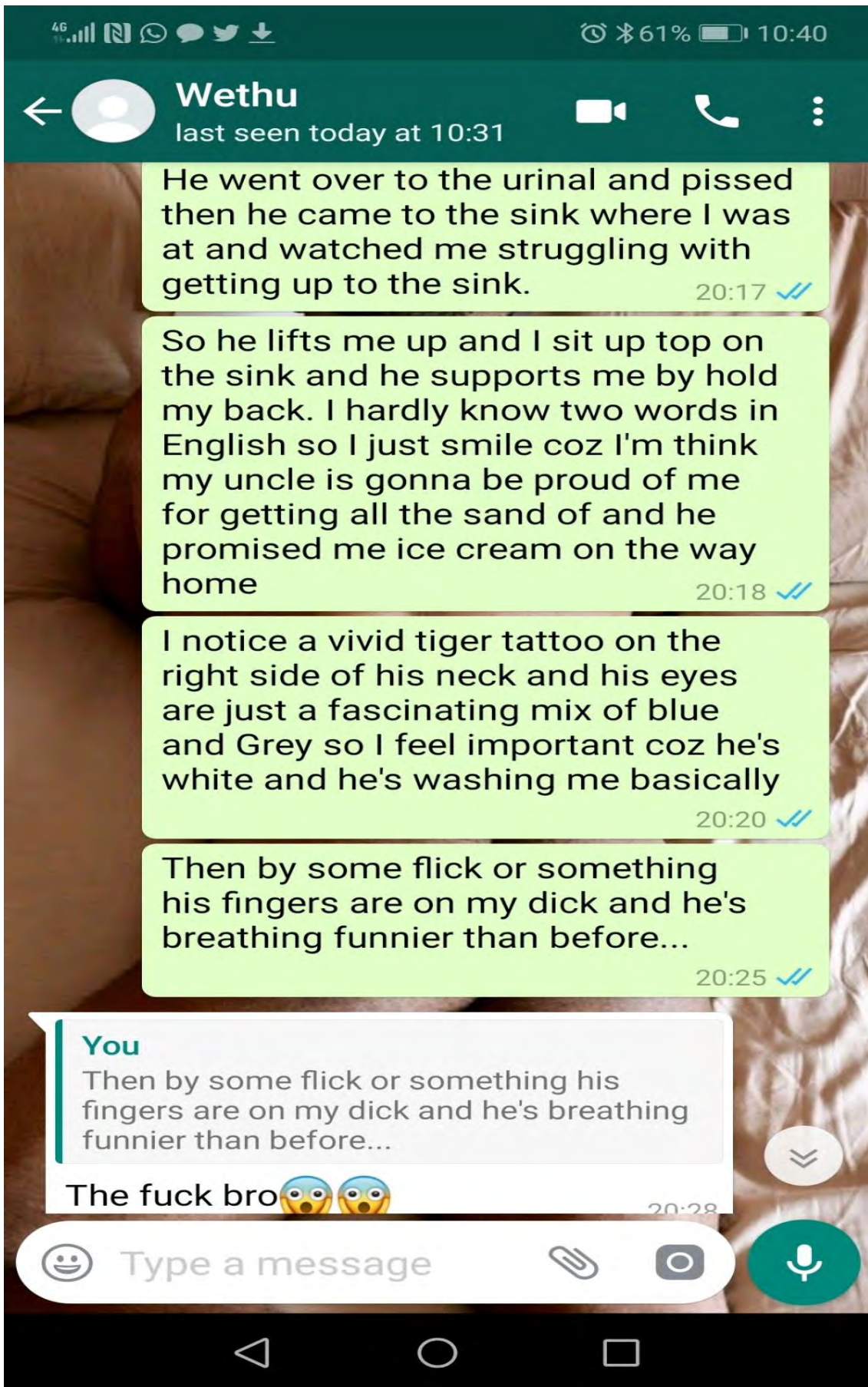
So I waited till the toilets were empty so I could use the sink. 20:07 ✓✓

I had the nice toilet all to myself... Back then they still cleaned the toilets and they smelled so good but I couldn't reach the sink to washg myself properly... 20:10 ✓✓

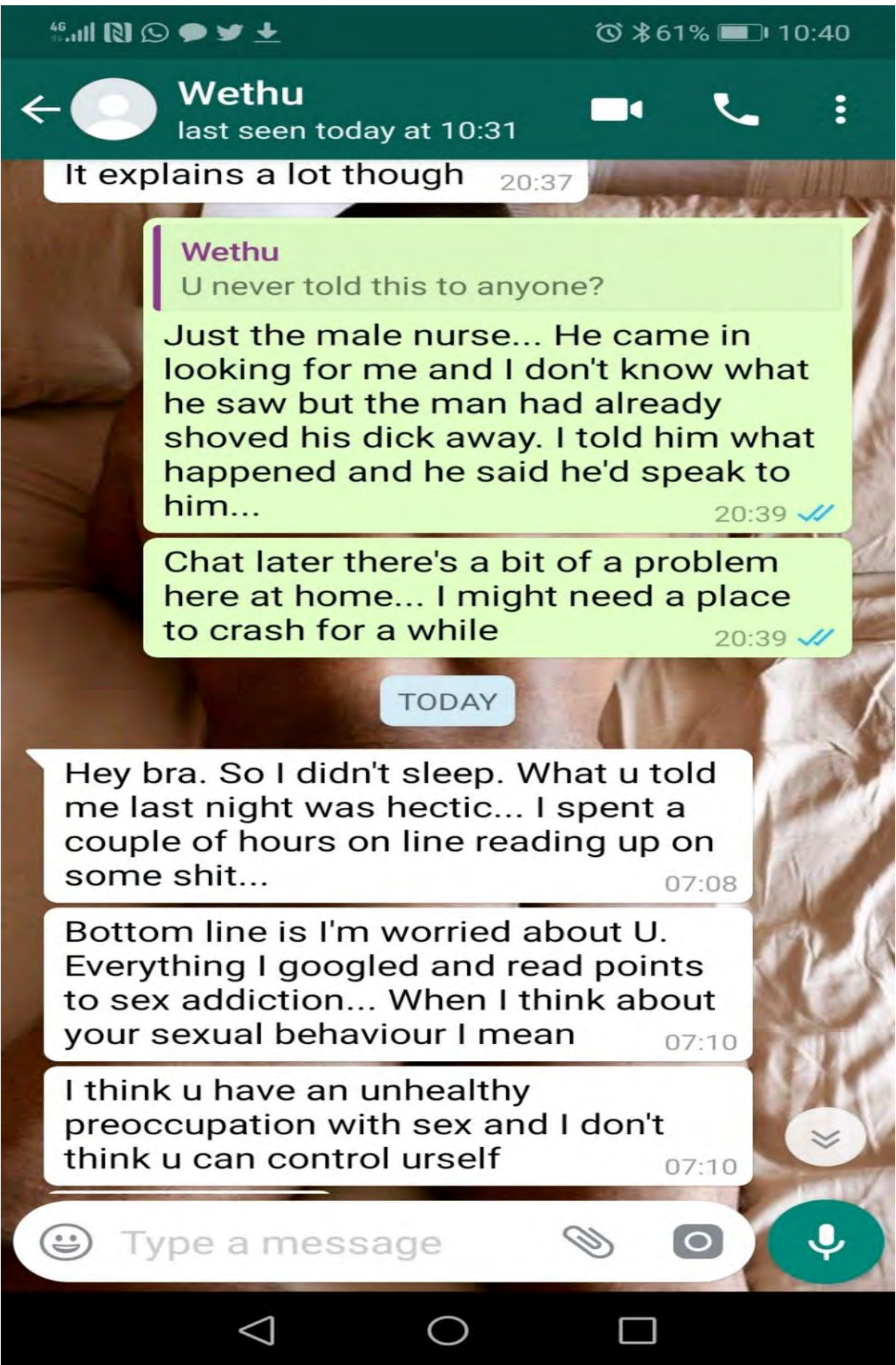


Type a message

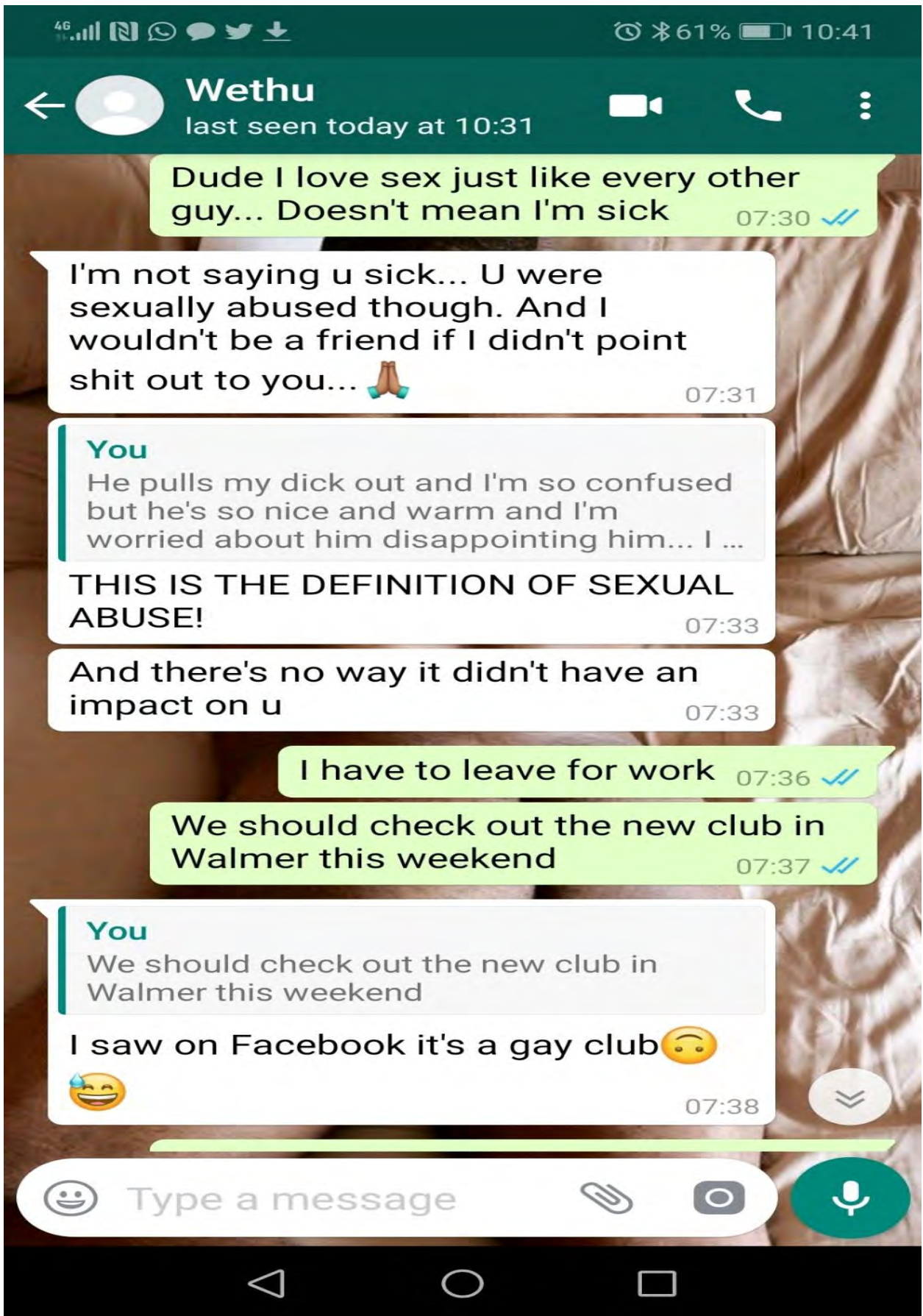












U the most sexually secure black man I know so...?

07:38 ✓✓



07:38

Nothing meant... Drinks will be cool no prob

07:39

🚫 *You deleted this message* 09:42

**You**

That could be my new thing on my Freak Twitter bio 😂

Do u notice how u always down play serious stuff though?  
I can't stop worrying. And when I even think that you even had sex at work... Where u teach kids in a classroom. I think there's something wrong there bro

10:27

Dude I'm just having fun 10:29 ✓✓

But when will u stop? Will u know when to stop?

10:30



Type a message



Sibadala (We are grown)





Zonke

last seen today at 20:58



Zonke

I will get married as soon as God makes a good Christian+Employed man available.

OK bye.

17:22 ✓✓

Me and U don't click as well as U and Noma do nhe?

18:14

Lol... Well

18:14 ✓✓



Is this an inappropriate way to initiate a conversation?

18:16 ✓✓

Oh my God Vuyo



18:17



Zonke

last seen today at 20:58



I've sent my crush from FNB this... He hasn't replied yet 18:18 ✓✓

No nudes if u don't mind. 18:19

So ur dad has been texting me. 18:19

Zonke So ur dad has been texting me.

Oh? 18:19 ✓✓

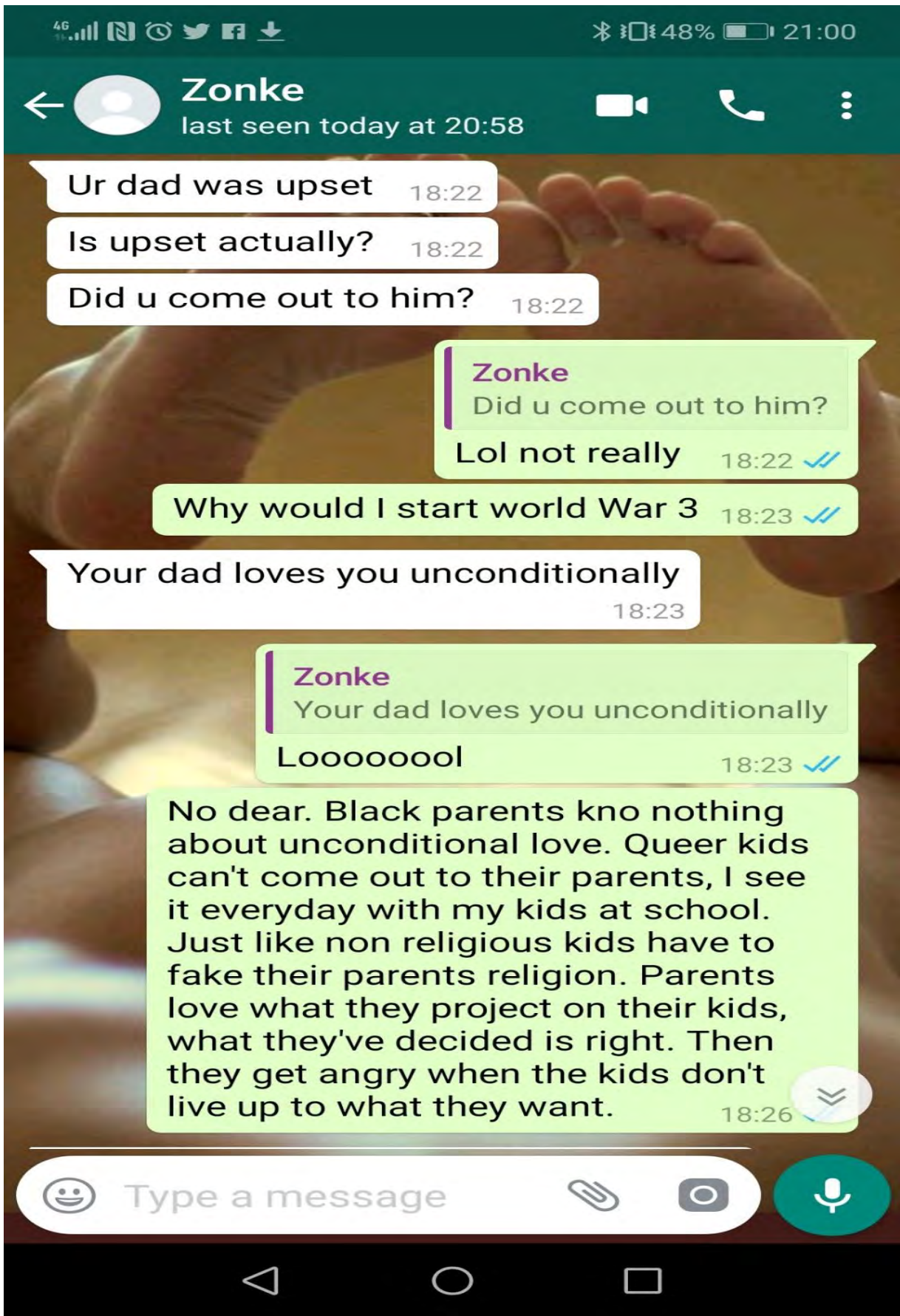
What happened on Saturday at the family thing? 18:20

What have u heard 18:20



Type a message







Zonke

last seen today at 20:58



So u did come out? Is uncle S gay too?

18:27

I'm asking coz ur dad mentioned him too... I think he wants me to intervene

18:28

**Zonke**

I'm asking coz ur dad mentioned him too... I think he wants me to intervene

What so u can pray for me?

18:28

I have decided to keep my sexuality as a grey area between me and the elders for 2 reasons.

1. I am not interested in being questioned a billion times or being asked why I dislike girls... Or causing chaos in their minds about me burning in hell. Coz I'm sure that's what they believe and I'm sure U believe it too.
2. I'm not a spokesperson for gays I just want to live my life without being made to feel guilty by my family. The rest of the world does that already

18:37



Zonke

last seen today at 20:58



Well u are right about me. And I think it's important that we are upfront about our beliefs. Sibadala!  
I do believe gays will NOT see heaven. I believe it is a sin what they do. If that makes e homophobic, then I'm homophobic.

Also. There is a reality this generation is denying and that is devil, spirit, demon obsession, oppression and possession. The devil operates in secret and wants to hide himself behind experts and charismatic people and their opinions and hypothesis. But I firmly believe a homosexual is someone thinking under the influence of a demon. And as a believer I can't encourage that.

19:09

I don't think it's necessary for us to talk any further about this or any other subject for that matter

20:52

You

What so u can pray for me?

There are former gays in my church that have been prayed for and cleansed of that spirit

20:55

I am more than happy to introduce you to my pastors

20:55

🙄 Babe let me masturbate and sleep.

20:56 ✓✓

You

I don't think it's necessary for us to talk any further about this or any other subject for that matter

Like I said 🙅

20:56 ✓✓



Type a message



## **Unravelling**

Wethu is annoyed with me because I did not fully disclose my real intention for inviting him out for drinks. We are getting out of his car when I tell him that the guy I told him about from my childhood could possibly be in this club.

“The fuck,” he exclaims.

I explain to him that I began a random conversation with a Nico on Grindr, and after this Nico sent me a picture of his face. I recognised the tattoo on his neck. Of course, it is not as smooth and appealing as it was back then, but it is on the exact same place and I’m sure I’m not mistaken. The only plan I have is to confront him and make him confess to what he did. I don’t know what I’ll do after that. It’s a gay club on a Friday night, so naturally there’s a lot of 80’s Madonna playing in between some disco hits. Wethu decides to stay but he refuses to be an accomplice to my plan so he heads over to the bar while I link up with the man I suspect to have molested me when I was seven. He is one of several wrinkly old men in the club hovering around much younger boys who have so obviously set financial terms for their presence around this senior age group. Nico and I move to a corner and I study his tattoo more closely. When I ask him about it, he says he’s always had it. There is no doubt in my mind now, Nico is the man from the toilet all those years ago. He is such a fangless lion now that I do not know how to confront him. But I am not stupid. I do not have over ten thousand followers on my Freak Twitter just because I post pictures of my dick. I know the moves to this dance.

“I hope you know that I’m just here for the sex,” I tell him. “I don’t want anything complicated.”

“Straight forward,” he says, “I like that. Very handsome black boy. I’m sure you have a nice dick. Is it cut?”

“You’ll like it, I’m sure.”

Wethu appears from nowhere and offers me a gin cocktail while he sips on a beer. He eyes Nico grudgingly but stays mute and disconcerting, so I gesture him to leave.

“So you brought a date?” Nico asks as Wethu walks off.

“He’s just a friend but he’s shy,” I say nonchalantly. “We can all have fun together later if you want.”

There’s a smile of approval on his face, I take his Savannah from his hand and sip on it. He smiles more broadly. He is wrinkly and moist, and not at all the type of man I would sleep with(if we don’t count that one time in the bushes by Baywest Mall) but I want to know what I want to know.

“I like you,” he says. “There’s a Naughty Corner upstairs, much less noise and people...”

“Lead the way.”

From the bar Wethu makes an enquiring look at me, I point upwards then I give him the thumbs up. He shakes his head at me.

There’s a strip show taking place in the Naughty Corner.

“I have no rules when it comes to sex,” I whisper in his ear.

“A real freak.”

“Yeah. I teach and I’m fighting off the urge to fuck some of my students. Don’t judge me,” I feign some shyness.

“Why are you fighting it. Fuck what you want. Life’s too short.”

“They just look so nice in those grey school trousers. Their nice butts show nice, especially when they’ve been squatting at soccer practise.”

I pause after saying this and I realise that I am not lying. I have appreciated this sight in the corridors of my school, but I’m not the pervert I tell myself. He is.

“I like black boys a lot. You should share with me when you get.”

“You’d be interested?”

“Fuck yeah. I love the young ones.”

“Sexy.”

He places his hand on my thigh.

“What’s the youngest you’ve ever fucked?”

He chuckles and sips his Savannah.

“I’m sure you have a story or two to tell. Something outrageous and awesome.”

The slight smile that develops on his face is one of pride and achievement.

“No judgements?”

“None at all.”

“My helper’s son sucks me off. He’s twelve now. He’s learnt to do it just right. I get him things, shoes and clothes. Nice stuff to shut him up.”

“Nice,” I smile approvingly.

“When I was younger, I found a black boy in the toilets at the beachfront...”

I hold my breath.

“He was trying to wash sand off himself but he couldn’t reach the sink. I helped him up then I played with his small dick. I got so hard I wanked and came all over him.”

“Wow. Did you not get caught?”

“Someone related to him came looking for him just as I was wiping the cum off the boy’s thigh. I put the boy down and smiled at the guy then I walked away.”

“You never saw the boy again?”

“Why the fuck would I? I don’t give a fuck.”

“That’s so interesting and exciting. And the boy’s relative? Did he confront you?”

“Long story short, I took him to Cape Town for a weekend and we fucked like rabbits. How lucky was I hey? But he ended up staying there. I don’t know what the fuck happened to him.”

“I’m going to dance now. Maybe we can chat later,” I say pulling away from him.

“Come on I’m having fun with you though. I’m enjoying your open mindedness.”

I don’t know what to do with him now that he’s confirmed it. I am unable to settle my thoughts, nor can I define what I’m feeling in that moment, or rather, I am determined to feel something. I want a rush of anger, something. But I’m numb. He follows me out of the Naughty Corner but I ditch him in the crowd on the dance floor.

I scout for Wethu at the bar. He is being pestered by a fem gay and does not seem particularly annoyed even though nothing will happen. Suddenly I cry at the thought of this friend who has endured a night out to a gay club for me when he has absolutely no interest in men whatsoever.

I consider that *he* is probably the only person that knows me completely for who and what I am and still chooses me. I am unable to control my tears, and they just keep coming. I am questioning the kind of person I am. Maybe Wethu was right about me needing therapy. I'm sobbing and everyone in the bathroom probably thinks I've just been dumped or I'm drunk, but I don't care.

I'm standing in front of a mirror when I hear the gunshots.

"That's not a song," I say to the drunk guy bobbing his head to the sound. "Those are shots. Someone's shooting a gun," I emphasize.

I drop to the floor when the music stops. Screams and a raging 'Trrrrrr, trrrrr,' sound replace *Like a Virgin*. Three guys rush in the door screaming, then another two and then another one until I can't keep count of the people rushing in the bathroom for safety. I crawl into and lock myself in a toilet cubicle where I momentarily take refuge.

There is utter chaos and death beyond the walls of the bathroom and my first thought is of Nico being a casualty. This hope ignites into a furious flame that any fear I have for myself diminishes. It would be such sweet justice if the shooter could spare one or two of his bullets for Nico. It would be justice. Someone in the bathroom is screaming at someone else to lock the door, and another is frantic about calling the police. People are talking, crying and screaming all at once. My thoughts fix themselves around the idea of Nico's possible demise. The anticipation of finding him dead in a pool of blood blooms in my head and I am filled with a warm eagerness. After several rounds of gunfire there is silence. I leap out of the cubicle and push through an assortment of sweaty, drunk guys who've crammed into the bathroom. I head out with no consideration of whether the gunman still lingers admiring his work or not. Blood on the floor and walls greets me first. The temptation to see blood gushing out of Nico grows more irresistible now, and I'm floating. The suspense is maddening. If I am lucky, I think to myself, I will find him barely gripping the last inches of his life. I want to be the last person he sees before he descends to hell where I hope his soul will burn for all eternity. I will probably follow him there one day but that is not important now I am gulping up the possible reparation. Sure I am trembling a bit and my fingertips feel funny as if pins are running through my hands, but God is good and there is justice in the world after all because I do find Nico dead. Some screams come from outside and inside as well as some footsteps, I'm dizzy, moving and spinning... Wethu oh shit Wethu, he completely slipped my mind, he was by the bar minding his own business, he's probably outside safe, maybe with the police van. I hear sirens, there are flashing lights, yes there's a police station up the road. Wethu! I'm shouting his name, panicking, I know he'll appear just now and there won't be a scratch on him and we'll go home to his new flat he just moved into, and I'll make flapjacks for him just the way he likes and I'll officially start looking for a girlfriend for him. I'm losing proper sense of time; it feels like my feet are stuck to the floor but I'm making my way out. Men in uniforms have their hands on me, I'm pulled outside by a constable and asked a lot of questions. I don't know what I saw, I was in the toilet, I didn't see the shooter only heard the shots, my friend his name is Wethu. Wethu where the fuck are you? More screams and people rushing out of the club left and right.

There are bodies on the pavement covered up by the cops, but I know those shoes I was with him when he bought them. I step closer and I don't see his face, it's all covered up, but I know the shape, I know Wethu's form. It's him underneath the cover. My best friend is dead.

### **A new home and a new normal.**

I am usually superb at organising family events and such gatherings. I like shining when everyone else panics. I am normally the calm one, getting all the minor details in place to ensure the significance of the day is memorable.

But its *Wethu's* funeral. He is dead because of me. I practically dragged him to his death. I can hardly pull myself out of bed let alone make any kind of arrangements. It's like there is a sarsen in the centre of my belly and another on my back wrapped up like a small but heavy child. I so want to lay them down and be helpful, *Wethu's* parents need support; but this heaviness, these boulders are demanding my full attention. They are forcing my thoughts to race, yet I am not thinking anything useful. How can I face anyone?

His mother calls me on the Friday before the funeral.

"M' boy, we going to the mortuary to look at the body one last time later. You must come with us."

Shit, I think to myself. A sandstorm develops in my throat. I cannot respond. Why is she inviting me to such an intimate thing? Why isn't she angry at me? Why the fuck isn't she blaming me for his death? That would be easier.

"Vuyo? Did you hear me m' boy? We're going to the..."

"Yes mama," I reply quickly.

Every word she speaks is reminding me of the best parts of my dead friend.

"You know wherever he is, *Wethu* is shining down on you because he loves you. You were like a brother to him you know," she reminds me.

A tremor from somewhere inside my gut ambushes me and I start wailing suddenly. I am howling in that horrific way Oprah Winfrey describes as 'the ugly cry' with my mouth wide open. My brain is telling itself that I should stop crying and be a man for once, but I do not stop. I can't. I cry like a lost child at the mall, and *Wethu's* mother starts praying for me.

### **Zanele leaves the shack**

My Auntie said it is best if I first go to my father's parents instead of going straight to my father. That way he will not be able to run or chase me away. His parents will make him take care of me she said. She thinks it only fair that he pays her for taking care of me for all these years. My Auntie is a new person now that she knows I am the daughter of a rich man. She has been talking about money nonstop. If it is up to her, my father will come and buy her a new face brick house with a flushing toilet and a fence. But I do not know how my father will take me or if he will take me at all when I get there. Also, she's told me to say nothing about being pregnant.

I go over to the house on a Saturday and the first thing I see in the yard is *ixhanti*, \* with some horns nailed on it. This gives me hope. If they are a family that believes in their culture, they will do *imbeleko* \* for me and my bad luck will end. At least, I hope so.

**NOTE:** *Ixhanti*: The family pillar which stands in the kraal. Here a Xhosa family will nail the horns of all cows sacrificed. It is a Xhosa family's alter which represents their clan. Usually a wooden pole. / *Imbeleko*: A traditional ceremony where a goat is slaughtered to introduce a child to his or her ancestors.

A makhulu \* is sitting on a bench in the veranda playing cards alone. She lifts her head when she hears me opening the gate and she looks at me with a doubting face.

“Ung’ban’?” \*

I begin to tell my story and when I finish, she yells, “Yhooo izani. Nanku uZanele. Fonani, fonani.” \*

She reminds me of my Auntie back in the shack. The only difference my Auntie will have on a doek and this makhulu is wearing a barrette.

Other people come out of the house to see what she is yelling about, an old man I soon learn is her husband and a woman who turns out to be my father’s sister. The woman does not believe my story and she asks me more questions about my dead mother and I feel that she does not like me or she did not like my mother. I don’t know what she is thinking.

“Liziwe fonela umninawa wakho, fonela wonke umntu,” says the makhulu. “NguNomonde wonke lo.” \*

The makhulu explains to me that the family did a ceremony four weeks ago for her late daughter Nomonde who is my Aunt. The makhulu says Nomonde is the one that has guided me to the family. She also says she is happy to have me so I can take care of her in her old age. Liziwe is in the house talking on the phone and I hear her telling everyone she’s speaking to about is’manga \* that has just happened. She returns to the veranda saying she has called everyone and most of them are on their way to see me. The only person she hasn’t called is Vuyo because he is still not well because of his dead friend. The makhulu smiles at me saying that Vuyo is my big brother. I smile back at her feeling wonderful that she is speaking to me as if I am one of them already. She tells me I have my father’s nose. The old man finally speaks and asks firmly if my father has been called because I am *his* problem and no one else’s. We then move into the lounge where Liziwe keeps looking at me as if she is a judge and I have broken the law. I can already tell she is the boss of the family and if I want my father to accept me, I know I must win her over to my side. She asks me about my schooling, and I panic. I do not feel I can go up against her, she is one of those ladies that knows everything and can tell when they are being tricked. She is nothing like my Auntie, but I soldier up and I tell her I was raped and could not finish school the way I wanted to. I tell her I wanted to be a teacher. She looks like a teacher, so I’m hoping to win her over. They are shocked by the news of me being raped but it’s better that the bomb comes early than later on. I go on to tell them that I am pregnant from the rape and I do not know who the baby’s father is. There is a long silence after I say these things, then at last the old man blasts out angrily that if my father had been responsible for me from the beginning I would have never been raped.

**NOTE: Makhulu: An elderly woman- a grandmother.**

**Ung’ban’: Who are you? / Yhooo izani. Nanku uZanele. Fonani. Fonani: (Exclaims) Come! Here is Zanele. Phone, phone.**

**Liziwe...umntu: Liziwe phone your younger brother. Phone everyone. /**

**NguNomonde wonke lo: This is Nomonde’s doing.**

**Ismanga: A strange thing**

They had always known about me, he says, but nothing was ever done. They all look disappointed and the makhulu says she doesn't know why my father is having such bad luck with his children of late. She says maybe my mother is cursing him from the grave and that maybe Vuyo is gay because of that curse. Maybe, she says. The old man shuffles in his chair when this is mentioned, and he does not look happy at all.

After maybe an hour people start arriving one by one. First my cousin Nomaqhawe, a woman, but she is dressed like a man. Another cousin, Zonke, who I am told is a twin, sweeps in saying she was coming from a church meeting. The makhulu explains that Zonke is a Jehovah's Witness and she asks me if I like Jehovah's Witnesses. When I tell her that I don't know any she whispers to me that it's good I don't know any Witnesses and that I must be careful of Zonke, she is going to do her very best to turn me into one. I smile at the makhulu because I know my experience with Sizwe has made me strong. Then my father arrives. I have always thought of meeting my father because in my mind my father would be the hero that would come and take me away to a new life and a new house.

He walks in slowly and searches the room for is'manga and our eyes meet. The minute he steps in I explode into tears just like my Auntie told me to. I cry and cry, my hands over my eyes and I am happy with myself for being able to have actual tears flooding down my cheeks. Honestly, I am crying naturally because I am feeling a thousand things but also because I know my crying will help my situation. I hear the makhulu calling for sugar water and one of the cousins brings a glass with sugar water for me. It will calm you down says makhulu. I drink it all up, watching the white sugar beads spinning in the glass as I swallow. I stop my crying and I settle quietly. My father sits next to his mother on the sofa and says, "Damn. Ubom' bunjani?" \*

"Nantsi intombi yakho Vusumzi," says Aunt Liziwe. "Ufikelwe lixesha lokuba umhoye." I am glad she is speaking because I feared how she would influence him but she is on my team.

**NOTE: Ubom' bunjani? : How is life?**

**Nantsi intombi yakho Vusumzi: Here is your daughter Vusumzi. / Ufikelwe...umhoye: The time has come for you to take care of her.**



**Slim Shady**

last seen today at 14:48



How's the funeral going? 09:25

I'm sorry that's a stupid question.

09:26

I'm just thinking of you. Be strong and don't worry abt anything else. Just grieve ur friend. I know u 2 were tight

09:27

**Slim Shady**

How's the funeral going?

Do u even care 😞 09:41 ✓✓

No one deserves to die the way your friend did and I hope they find the rubbish that did it yazi

09:42

**Slim Shady**

No one deserves to die the way your friend did and I hope they find the rubbish that did it yazi

I'm to blame for Wethu's death. I'm the one who asked him to go to that stupid club for a stupid reason too. It's my fault

09:44 ✓✓



Slim Shady

last seen today at 14:48



It's tough when someone u love dies I know. But im here for u. It's not ur fault

09:45



09:46

It's gonna be a short service. Just the grandparents spoke now and his sister. They wanted me to say something but I couldn't. How could i when I'm the one who should be in the casket?

09:47

Anyway we gonna go to the graveyard now to put him in his new home.

09:49

I just don't get it though. All the fucked up things I've done in my life and Wethu who is an innocent dies just randomly. I wish I could explode into a billion pieces right now

09:50

Dude stop all this now.

09:51

*This message was deleted*

09:51

Look I don't really know what to say to coz I don't know ur pain... But dude just be strong man.

09:52



Type a message





**Slim Shady**

last seen today at 14:48



Has aunt Liz called u? Probably not I guess

09:53

**Slim Shady**

Has aunt Liz called u? Probably not I guess

Why would she?

12:11

**Slim Shady**

Look I don't really know what to say to coz I don't know ur pain... But dude just be strong man.

We've buried Wethu

12:12

I've never really prayed b4.  
I just pray his spirit is at peace and at home wherever he is.

12:12

**You**

Why would she?

Have u not checked the family group?

12:19

No. Not planning to either

12:19

Your dad has a daughter called Zanele

12:20





**Slim Shady**

last seen today at 14:48



Sh e rocked up at the main house kumakhulu this morning 12:20

Aunt Liz has summoned all of us 12:21

I'm at work so I can't 12:21

**Slim Shady**  
Aunt Liz has summoned all of us  
Andizi! 12:21 ✓✓

I can book a room for us later... We can be alone 😂 If u up to it 12:23

**Slim Shady**  
I can book a room for us later... We can be alone 😂  
If u up to it  
Lol. Just before he died Wethu wanted me to get some therapy coz he thought I was hypersexual 12:24 ✓✓

Wtf? What's hypersexual? 12:24

Mxm but the word says it all I guess 12:25





**Slim Shady**

last seen today at 14:48



He said I have a negative preoccupation with sex... 12:26 ✓✓

But the thing is rn I'm so dead inside I could give a fuck about fucking 12:26 ✓✓

And when I think about it all the times I was enjoying that whore phase I felt nothing. The sex left me empty and I felt dirty afterwards. The only sex that I've ever enjoyed was with u and its because I'm actually in love with you but how... U my fucken cousin 12:28 ✓✓

I don't know how I got to be this fucked up 12:29 ✓✓

We're all fucked up to some extent 12:29

Do u think seeing a therapist will be good for you 12:30

I don't kno. 12:31 ✓✓

I just feel like and alien... Like I'm in a place I don't know and I am alone and the best option for me is to die. Even breathing right now is too heavy 12:31 ✓✓

Type a message





**Slim Shady**

last seen today at 14:48



**You**

I just feel like and alien... Like I'm in a place I don't know and I am alone and the best option for me is to die. Even bre...

Don't do anything stupid Vuyo

12:32

I'm just tired man

14:39 ✓✓

Maybe I should come out officially

14:40 ✓✓

Maybe I should confront the male nurse about the sexual abuse from my childhood and the role he played and the kiss and everything

14:40 ✓✓

Maybe I should put it out there that I'm in love with u

14:41 ✓✓

Maybe getting shit out in the open will fix things


14:41 ✓✓

**You**

Maybe I should come out officially

Don't u fucken dare

14:42

←  **Slim Shady** last seen today at 14:48   

Maybe I should put it out there that I'm in love with u

If u wanna turn the whole fucken family against u then sure do 14:42

And trust me bra I will deny it...if u say anything happened between us. You'll be on your own 14:43

**Slim Shady**

And trust me bra I will deny it...if u say anything happened between us. You'll be on your own

I am on my fucken own now Wethu's gone 😭😭😭😭😭 14:44 ✓✓

I've googled some local therapists and Imma phone around for pricing for u 14:45

Do nothing and speak to no one in the fam 14:45

Not even Noma 14:45

😭😭😭😭😭😭😭 14:46 ✓✓

What the fuck does Zanele want? 16:59 ✓✓

Money I suppose 16:59 ✓✓

 Type a message   

### **An outlaw and the glue that sticks everyone back.**

My cousin Slim Shady has convinced me to seek professional help. He says I am going to hurt myself, I fear he might be right. I catch my thoughts racing sometimes and I am hardly sleeping. I feel like a black hole, a danger to everything and everyone.

Also, I don't know if there is any fight in me to work against the misconceptions of my family. With good reason. The constitution in black families is written by those with healthy bank balances and the best exhibitors of black masculinity. The catch-up games dictate this principle. Where there are decisions to be made, or insights to be shared; the elders dispense their wisdom and experience on the whims of those who are approved as men. My father, the wealthiest member of the family and a traditional Xhosa man, has decided that under no uncertain terms will there be a gay person in the Skhomo clan.

If we were the British Royal family; I'd be Diana Princess of Wales. A non-starter. Something of an outlaw.

Days and weeks go by after Wethu's funeral and I am slowly peeling away at the layers of guilt that burden me. Wethu's mom is my primary source of solace as I have not spoken to my father or grandparents since the publication of my sexual orientation.

Noma has been kind enough to let me stay with her while I look for a place of my own. It's proven necessary now that my father has made his views clear. At first, I thought I cared about his opinions on the subject. I thought I wanted approval and family acceptance.

Keeping my sexuality under wraps was a way of maintaining the norm and peace within the household. The less people know, the less questions there are. But of course, I was mistaken. I know that my feelings, and perspective will not matter more to my relatives than the family's good name.

Perhaps our parents spend a lot of time loving the idea they have built up of who we are in their minds, instead of getting to know and loving us for our true selves. Now I know that my father loved the idea of a male heir who would one day inherit his business and maintain a heterosexual identity that fits all the norms and expectations of black society. But are we responsible for the miscalculations our parents make when it comes to us? And are we really representations of our families? As I cried on the phone while Wethu's mother prayed for me I realised that keeping the peace and being secretive about who I am had turned me into a prisoner of male privilege and patriarchy. Any idea my elders had of me was an assumption I had allowed them to create and the real me was a hostage that would escape in stolen moments with strangers on twitter and in dark corners. I would not have chosen to be outed the way I was, but it is good and important to know what we mean to the people closest to us. I watched Wethu's casket being swallowed by the earth and I remembered him saying, "Bro labels don't matter. I want to stand for something." Wethu stood for respect and he appreciated human value. I cannot honour my best friend's memory if I continue to lead a lifestyle that was indirectly or directly responsible for his death, and in breaking away from that lifestyle I need to be more honest and upfront.

On a Friday after work I drive by my grandparent's place for a conversation with my grandfather. I have not been here since that Sunday afternoon when my father wiped death all over me.

I arrive to find my grandparents sitting on a bench outside in the shade and a young woman emerges from the house carrying a tray with juices and fruit. Zanele, I assume, as I park my car. My grandfather talks about the weather a little too excessively when he is avoiding a particular subject, but my grandmother is the sharpshooter. She immediately asks me if what my father said about me is true and I direct my eyes to the stranger holding the tray.

"Molo bhuti," \* she says warmly.

"Hello."

The girl is in slippers and seemingly knows her way round the house. She has been staying with them and has been impressing my female cousins endlessly with her care for the house and our grandparents.

"Ngudadenu lo," \* says my grandmother.

Her presence in our family home and her familiarity with everything is just further proof to me of the inconsistency within our family. Had I been her, I doubt I would have gone out in search of a father who chose not to care or ask about me when I was younger. But I suppose I grew up in the candy store while she had the very worst experience. Still, I wonder if I will ever be able to make my relatives see how phony they are for judging something I cannot control, something I have no say over, while they condone behaviour that has not only dented the family name but that has left a lot of people damaged. It is as if they forgot that my mother committed suicide because of my father's affair.

"So you want to be a woman my boy?" my grandfather asks with an unusual hint of naivety. He is in foreign waters now and fears for us both. I resolve to be gentle and patient.

"Ever since I was boy, I have only been interested in boys. I've wondered about it myself; I've cried about it when I was younger and when you guys would force me to church, I would pray about it but nothing ever changed. I have always been this way, and I am not bewitched. I am not sick or crazy. I don't have an evil spirit that is making me do this. This is me. It is not what I have chosen, it's what I got, it's who I am."

"We can't support something like this," says my grandmother.

I look in her eyes and I understand the new world I have tossed them into, and their incapacity for navigation in this new world is apparent. They are frightened, of what, I have no desire to know.

At a different time, I would have quickly reassured them that I was going to get over this gay thing and start dating girls. But things are different now and I realise I cannot bury myself for the sake of keeping things kosher.

"I am not looking for support from anyone," I say in a respectful tone. "I am not looking for acceptance and I don't want you two worrying about me burning in hell or bad luck from the ancestors. I want to live a truthful life, and *this* is the truth."

**NOTE: Molo bhuti: Hello brother.  
Ngudadenu lo: This is your sister**

Both of them inhale deeply before looking out into space. Nothing further will be discussed here so I say my goodbyes and head for my car. I am opening the gate when I hear Zanele from inside the house, “Bye bhuti,” there is such hope in her voice, a need to belong and to be accepted. I know the desperation too well. I pause by the gate when a quick debate takes place in my head. Do I ignore her and continue as if she doesn’t exist, or do I acknowledge her and provide the validation she so clearly desires? In other words, do I continue in the way I have recognised in my father as hypocritical and destructive or do I take a stand and be the example of acceptance and peace necessary in the family? I turn around and walk up towards her. Her belly bump is showing so I hug her gently. She squeezes me and the hug lasts longer than I intended.

### **Zanele’s new way of life**

I have come to know the weekly menu at my tamkhulu and makhulu’s \* place. Monday it is rice, green vegs left over from Sunday lunch, maybe with mince. Tuesday it is a light supper. Wednesday it is samp and beans with no meat. Thursday it is Umphokoqo \* if it hot but if it is cold then it will be rice, vegs and whatever meat is there. Friday is red meat and if the cousins have money, they make a braai on Saturday. Then Sunday it is a big lunch. All of them are surprised that I can cook and that I am so good at the kitchen, even with washing dishes. My cousins are so stylish, and they have been so good to me with giving me clothes they don’t use and even an old cell phone that was just sitting in a drawer.

But things have been so tense since I came because of my brother and this gay thing of his. In my old township by the shacks they do not like the gay people, especially the ones that dress like girls. If Vuyo lived there he would get beaten up. But at least he is not like those that wear make-up and put on wigs. Those ones that put on high heels and make a joke of themselves. This thing with Vuyo is making the elders upset. They are saying he is choosing madness. I don’t think Vuyo is mad but if it was me, I would never choose to do something that would make the family hate me. He was nice to me the day he came to visit tamkhulu and makhulu. When he hugged me, he whispered into my ear that I must watch out for myself and that I must take care of my baby. He spoke to me as if he was saying goodbye. Goodbye not just to me but to the family also. I think he feels like he has been thrown away like a piece of trash.

It is not a nice time for the family and I feel sad for Vuyo because just as he feels out, I am in. My father’s sister, Liziwe was very surprised when she heard that I was able to take out the curry stain in the white shirt tamkhulu wears at church. She asked me what my secret was, and I told her I learnt it from my Auntie. At last there are some good things coming from all the things Auntie taught me about cleaning and taking care of things. I have stopped living at my Auntie’s shack, but she visits the house and has supper with us now and then. She is not going to get the fancy house that she was hoping for, but she has been welcomed by my father’s family, so she is not complaining.

**NOTE: Umphokoqo: A South African meal often referred to as African salad, made with mealie meal and served with sour milk**

My baby is growing. Before I came to stay with my father's family I did not think of myself as a mother and even now I do not think of myself as a complete mother, but when you are a part of a family and when you are given a place that is your own, you get to know and see new things about yourself. I know that I can take care of my child and it's up to me if I am going to hate it because of the way it was made. It is not the child who made Sizwe kak on me, so why must I hate my child? My cousins Noma and Zonke don't have kids, so they are excited, and they have been buying clothes, a walking-ring and nappies for it. They say we must do something called a gender reveal. I don't know what a gender reveal is but they keep saying we must do it because it will bring the family together in a nice way. They say the only person who can organise it is Vuyo because he is the organiser of the family. I think they are trying to use the baby to make a peace for everyone. I don't mind because they are taking me as one of the family, plus, it will be good if I can be the glue that sticks everyone back together. So, as I am giving my father his supper, I tell him that my big brother came by the house and he was nice to me. I tell him that  
Also, I will never be choked by the smell of toilet.

### **Vuyo**

I am having lunch at the Spur with Slim Shady and we are talking about how we need to get the sexual context out of our relationship and continue forward as not only as cousins but as allies and brothers, when my phone rings. It's my father. He is chewing something juicy and I picture him biting into a watermelon as he speaks to me. This is a sign that he calls in peace. He is calling to tell me about the gender reveal thing and is wondering if it is like a kitchen party, because if it is a kitchen party he will finance it but he won't attend. I then summarise what a gender reveal is and how inclusive they can be for all members of the family, regardless of gender. He provides me with a long 'Ooooh', and I wonder who this man is who listened to something and actually processed it. After a few moments he tells me he's decided to do Imbeleko for Zanele and that he needs me to be there since he hopes I will take over Umkhonto from him one day. I am his one and only son after all, he says.

**End**

# **PORTFOLIO**

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Creative Writing

of

Rhodes University

by

SIYA NTSUMPA

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## INTRODUCTION

In this portfolio I intend to showcase my thought process and progress over the past 2 years. It has been a fulfilling but testing journey as a writer.

My main challenge has been to make time to write and, I think, finding what I wanted the end project to be about.

In the next few pages you will read through some of my Reflective Journals where I have done my best to express the thoughts flooding through my mind since February last year.

I do not believe I would have been as successful as I have been on the course without the contact sessions. They have been invaluable, and I owe an incredible debt to my peers and teachers for the process of sharing work. I am indeed a more matured writer today than I was when I first embarked on this journey.

## Final Thoughts on Draft Thesis Feedback

I have finally received the much-anticipated Reader Report on my draft thesis.

Unexpectedly, it is not as frightful as we all had imagined the responses would be. In relation with my narrative and formula or format, my main concern was whether the Reader would 'get it'.

This draft project might not be the first of its nature, but it is an experimental piece that is somewhat provocative. On this course I have learnt the importance of intension. Every story must have an intension no matter what the format; in fact, the formats chosen by the writer must aide or contribute to the intension of the work. For a long while I asked myself, 'What do you want this story to do? What do you want it to say?'

When I first began writing *In Sex* (a play on *incest*) I really had no concrete concept of what the intension was but as the idea grew and my pen gave birth to new sentences and senses I began to see where and how I wanted the lessons I have learnt as a student of creative writing to appear.

By the time we reached the final contact week I already knew what I wanted the story to be and what reading experience I wanted any potential reader to have when going through the work.

To my knowledge, there are not many popular books or even films that challenge patriarchy and the prescribed ideas of manhood in black communities or more directly in the Xhosa culture. Furthermore, literature or creative work that links or articulates homosexuality, familial dysfunction in direct relation to black communities is tabooed and regarded with distaste.

So in exploring the lives of 1) a young gay man 2) his homophobic and incestuous uncle 3) his estranged and impoverished half-sister, I thought of the easiest and yes, most refreshing manner of presenting their experiences.

From the Reader's first paragraph in the report I am informed that I have achieved my goals superbly.

I am happy that the Reader Report also reflects on the experimentation of the work. By the end of the novella, everything a reader knows about reading a traditional novella must be unsettled. I hope to achieve this by breaking away from the traditional or known formula of language. For example, there are large sections in the work where I have used no punctuation as means of emphasising the emotion and pace of a particular situation. Again, the Report affirms that this device in relation to the theme and tone of the overall work is successful.

More than anything, I greatly appreciate the pointing out of sections where I have missed the mark. The Reader Report provides a clear and I believe accurate perspective of the work as a whole. The draft is not perfect. It is, after all, the first draft and I do concede that I rushed through the final chapters where, I am now faced with rewriting and adding where necessary.

Finally, I appreciate the emphasis on strict editing. Of course, by now I already know that as a writer I must be prepared to be my very own editor first. But knowing something and putting that knowledge into practice are two different things. Editing one's own work is not always easy, but it is an essential part of writing.

I appreciate how the Reader Report notes key areas where I can make the necessary corrections. In this regard I cannot help but view the Report as important as the various seminars we have participated in throughout the course. In no small way has it contributed to my overall perception of what the work is and what it can be.

## BOOK REVIEWS

AUTHOR	TITLE	GENRE
ZINZI CLEMMONS	WHAT WE LOSE	NOVEL
HELEN OYEYEMI	THE OPPOSITE HOUSE	NOVEL
A BRINK & JM COETZEE (ed)	A LAND APART	ANTHOLOGIES
E.W. ALLFREY (ed)	AFRICA39	ANTHOLOGIES
KRISTIINA EHIN	WALKER ON WATER	SHORT STORIES
CHAVISA WOODS	THINGS...OTHER STORIES	SHORT STORIES
EDUARDO GALEANO	MIRRORS: STORIES OF ALMOST EVERYONE	NON-FICTION & MEMOIR
THERESA HAK KYUNG CHA	DICTEE	NON-FICTION & MEMOIR
LANCE OLSEN & T. DODGE	ARCHITECTURES OF POSSIBILITY: AFTER INNOVATIVE WRITING	ON WRITING
KIM ADDONIZIO	ORDINARY GENIUS: A GUIDE FOR THE POET WITHIN	ON WRITING
J&D ROTHENBERG (eds)	SYMPOSIUM OF THE WHOLE	POETRY
R. BEROLD (ed)	IT ALL BEGINS: POEMS FROM POSTLIBERATION SOUTH AFRICA	POETRY

## NOVELS/NOVELLAS

### **ZINZI CLEMMONS: WHAT WE LOSE**

The main character in the story deals with the overwhelming loss of her mother. The novel undertakes the commendable task of addressing the controversial topics of race, class, gender and identity. Clemmons and her Protagonist are both half coloured/half African American. Based on her heritage I imagine Clemmons captures and articulates issues of prejudice exceptionally well, however several reviewers found the story itself lacking despite being beautifully written. *What We Lose* is a fairly short novel I would be highly interested in giving a try.

### **HELEN OYEYEMI: THE OPPOSITE HOUSE**

Oyeyemi was first published when she was 18 years old and I think that is remarkable. If I were to read her fantasy novels, it would be to understand her technique; how she has shaped her worlds and characters.

## ANTHOLOGIES

### **A BRINK & J M COETZEE: A LAND APART**

I enjoy strong South African voices, more particularly, strong South African stories where we see characters I can identify and relate with in terms of race and cultural experience. Brink and Coetzee's *A Land Apart* is replete with such stories, that I can't believe I've never read it.

### **E. W. ALLFREY (ed)**

### **AFRICA39: NEW WRITING FROM AFRICA SOUTH OF THE SAHARA**

I chose both these anthologies based on their African voices, but also mastering the short story is a skill I crave. It takes a lot of craftsmanship to put together a solid piece of short fiction and I intend on doing a lot of reading to improve my technique.

## SHORT STORIES

### **KRISTINA EHIN: WALKER ON WATER**

From the research I found that Ehin's work is, for the most part, fantastical. She is able to distort the world as we know it with weird characters and settings. Ordinarily I am not a fan of fantasy but in the spirit of exploring new techniques and engaging new voices, I think Ehin would be worth it.

## **CHAVISA WOODS: THINGS TO DO WHEN YOU'RE GOTH IN THE COUNTRY**

Stories that challenge the status quo or what is deemed 'normal' behaviour are important. As I researched Woods' Things to... the Country I found an author with a similar attitude towards fiction as I do. I believe fiction and poetry can teach us a lot about ourselves, our behaviours and our choices. Woods explores this in her work to a great extent and is capable of showing the dark side of a grown man as cleverly and delicately as does that of a little girl.

### NON-FICTION & MEMOIRS

#### **EDUARDO GALEANO: MIRRORS**

In his review of Mirrors, Neil Gordon describes the book as a 'capsule history of the human race'. In almost 600 short stories the reader is transported from prehistory to the present, from the impressionistic to the brutally, precisely documented. Mirrors sounds like a dreary complicated political book however I would be interested in reading the meditation on the likelihood that Adam and Eve were black.

Mirrors is said to be Galeano's most ambitious work since Memory of Fire.

"Galeano's prose is nearly lulling in its lyricism," says Gordon. "His powerful voice reminds us of the responsibility of writers to be constantly in search of new forms of expression that may draw us out of our complacency."

#### **THERESA HAK KYUNG CHA: DICTEE**

Although Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's artworks are not well-known, her work of Poetry Dictee has received critical attention. Dictee is the Korean American's most popular work and is an autobiography that transcends the self. Dictee is the story of several women: the Korean revolutionary Yu Guan Soon, Joan of Arc, Demeter and Persephone, Cha's mother Hyung Soon Huo and of course Cha herself. These women are united by suffering and the transcendence of suffering. The result is an exquisite work of authority, intricacy and lasting beauty. Female survival stories are without a doubt compelling and essential to literature, for women suffering normally emanates from the hands of patriarchy.

The book was first published the same year Cha was murdered.

## ON WRITING

### **LANCE OLSEN & T. DODGE: ARCHITECTURES OF POSSIBILITY: AFTER INNOVATIVE WRITING**

The book covers all the basics of creative writing and is replete with helpful advice. In his English 5510 class at the University of Utah, Olsen made his students read every chapter of the book and they had to complete the exercises too. Many of the students said their writing improved tremendously after this. One of the best quotes from the book is, “Read, read, read and write, write, write. Read everything: trash, classics, good and bad and see how they do it. Just like a carpenter who works as an apprentice and studies the master. You should know more about your character than you openly share with your audience.”

### **KIM ADDONIZIO: ORDINARY GENIUS: A GUIDE FOR THE POET WITHIN**

“The creative process is just that,” says Kim Addonizio. “Not a means to an end, but an on-going participation.”

This is rated as the best book for both the experienced writer as well as a beginner.

## POETRY

### **J & D ROTHENBERG: SYMPOSIUM OF THE WHOLE: A RANGE OF DISCOURSE TOWARD AN ETHNOPOETICS.**

I’d never heard of the word ethnopoetics before. According to google the term means “a method of recording text versions of oral poetry or narrative performances that uses poetic lines, verses and stanzas to capture the formal, poetic performance elements which would otherwise be lost in written texts”. It’s a mouthful.

Jerome Rothenberg is one of the major contributors to ethnopoetics, he coined the term in the 1960’s. Catherine S. Quick claims that Rothenberg had recognized that “most translations of Native American oral traditions...failed to capture the power and beauty of the oral performances on the written page.”

Symposium traces a discourse on poetry and culture that has profoundly influenced the art of our time.

I doubt I would find this book interesting.

**R. BEROLD (ed): IT ALL BEGINS: POEMS FROM POSTLIBERATION SOUTH AFRICA**

It All Begins is a collection of poems in English by over fifty South African poets, with several contemporary translations. The poems were published in the poetry Journal New Coin between 1989 and 1999. The poems were written over a period which included apartheid, the release of Nelson Mandela, South Africa's first democratic elections. It was an interesting time to be a poet, as fascinating works were produced to motivate a new age. Some of the poets include Lionel Abrahams and Mxolisi Nyezwa who puts together the quarterly KOTAZ JOURNAL.

Some of the books I've read on the course.

AUTHOR	TITLE
PAUL BEATTY	THE SELLOUT
BESSIE HEAD	A QUESTION OF POWER
LOUIS-FERDINAND CELINE	JOURNEY TO THE END OF THE NIGHT
CHAVISA WOODS	LOVE DOESN'T MAKE ME GENTLE OR KIND

### Paul Beatty: The Sellout

It's a satire so the humour is of an acquired taste. I had to really work hard to get into a steady groove with this story. By the third chapter the reader begins to sympathise with the protagonist.

### Bessie Head: A Question of Power

I fell in love with Bessie Head's Maru and was keen to jump into A Question or Power. Head is capable of creating exceptionally rhythmic prose that moves along the page like a song. One never gets bored when reading her work, her sentences are always packed with double meanings and colour.

### Louis-Ferdinand Celine: Journey To The End Of The Night

The author was recommended to me during Contact week. I had not heard of him or his work before. I have only read the first 10 pages of the book.

### Chavisa Woods: Love Does Not Make Me Gentle or Kind

The short stories her are so crisp and clear that one can't help but speed through the pages of the book. I think Woods masters short stories. Sundown in the Land of Lincoln is one of my favourites. Her technique is so concise and compacted that she does a lot with very little.

## **Reflective Journals**

April 2018

It's interesting how the feedback I receive in the online sessions with my group is always in part, points I've raised with myself or questions I've asked myself about the work during my writing process.

This week Nathan touched on an important issue in response to my piece; craftsmanship. While writing, this was and still is a major concern of mine. The story I submitted for my assignment was autobiographical, but I certainly wasn't aiming for sympathy more than I wanted to showcase a great piece of writing. I don't want to write for the sake of writing. I am learning that some of the best writing comes when one is editing. The point, I think, is to trust my instincts when it comes to editing my work. However this is easier said than done as I never have enough certainty that I'm not cutting out the best part and leaving in the most irrelevant portions of the story. I suppose more practice is necessary on my part.

What I'm still finding challenging is giving feedback on other people's writing. It also becomes so boring giving the same responses, 'It's nice. I love it.'

Of course the aim is to contribute more to all the writers but insecurities about my own work have a crippling effect on what I give back. I feel quite hypocritical pinpointing flaws or making recommendations on other people's writing when my own is so heavy with errors. I hated finding small blunders while reading the piece online, it's amateurish and sloppy. But besides the little grammar mistakes, it's a little embarrassing reading the work aloud and realising 'Damn I could have used a better sentence there'. Still, none of this is personal and the ultimate goal for everyone, I imagine, is to improve and not to offend or be offended.

I can talk on and on about the anthology I've chosen for reading group: *The New Black*. Firstly, I'm beginning to appreciate and accept the difference between the books and authors I normally go for versus the authors and books recommended and made available to me on the course. It is important to note this once again because when choosing reading material I am prone to gravitate towards what is familiar and comfortable for me; which isn't exactly helpful for someone who wishes to improve his craft. My favoured writers and books are fine as a foundation for me as a reader. They are there to entertain me and to provide enjoyment. But if I want to build on my writing skills I must be challenged. I must throw myself into an uncomfortable space of reading, ceaselessly. I must read the way I want to write. I've gained great insight from Beatty and Woods so far, in terms of what can be done on the page. These are writers I would not have easily drifted towards at a bookshop. I think a writer needs to have a shock experience through his or her reading so that it can be established in the writer's head that for the writer, there should be no comfort zone.

Now, back to my chosen anthology. I've read countless anthologies before, some I still keep on my bookcase at home. However, few are as exciting to me as *The New Black*. I have never come across an anthology where every single story devours me from the beginning to the very last full stop. I'm not exaggerating. The book is well crafted and brilliant. Each story owns a peculiar magic, either in the way it is written, in its premise or just the subject matter. In terms of form, Roxane Gay's *HOW* opened my eyes to a new way of shaping a story. *The New Black* shows the up-and-coming writer how to escape the traditional and therefore tedious way of presenting a story. The lazy format of having a beginning, a climax and an ending is torn to shreds in Gay's story of personal conflict.

I have happily absorbed some important pointers and tricks from this one. In her story, Gay breaks events into small, delicious chunks that don't necessarily move in a straight line. She mingles the reader between the past and the present, yet not once does the reader feel lost or confused about what is going on. Roxane Gay has judged countless writing contests for reputable Journals overseas, so she knows what to do with a short story. She operates through her narrative with such skill and precision. Roxane is master to learn from, no doubt.

I also loved *THAT BABY*, which I have chosen to read during the next reading group session.

After reading a few stories from the anthology the following conclusions are highlighted further in my mind...

1. Editing is important.
2. You don't need to say too much. (Let the reader do some thinking of their own but don't leave questions unanswered that the reader starts rewriting the work)
3. Try to avoid telling words such as, was, were, has etc. (I noted how minimally Roxane uses 'and' in the story. She uses punctuation instead.)
4. Consider your voice when writing. (In my last assignment, written in first person, there were times where the voice writer and the protagonist were mingled. This was picked up during the online reading session but honestly it was a challenge for me while writing the piece as well.)
5. Pay attention to genre. (Each piece will be different and will have a specific readership)
6. Let the work sit and simmer. (This speaks to focus and preparation. It means I can't start writing something at the last minute, I must prepare in advance, so the work is allowed time to mature properly through all the stages of writing. This will take more discipline than anything else.)
7. Read the work aloud. (Vital)

In order to excel at this, I have to ask myself continuously how do I shape my writing to get the reader's blood racing? How do I stay away from those small errors that spoil everything? For now, all I can think of is practice and more reading.

During the last reading session, I felt I'd cheated somewhat, particularly with regards to Leigh-Anne's reading selection; 'Devin Gibbons A Short Story'. I went back to the piece and read it again. Firstly, I hated that I came across as careless, dismissive and disinterested with my peer's reading selection. I thought I should rectify that. I was asked during the session why I'd disliked the piece and I couldn't really articulate my reasons. Upon a second read I pinpointed what I wouldn't have done if I were writing the story, as well as why I wouldn't have been interested in the story if it were in a magazine or anthology outside the requirements of the course.

Somewhere along the story the narrator describes the work he's left for the reader as, A messy job.

I found this story difficult even on the second read. The story is about a writer retelling a story he wrote. He explains his story in drips and dabs for example, one of the characters is 'Rafa', who 'was not beautiful'. He goes further to say as the author of the story he's talking about he could not exactly say *why* the character was not beautiful, although he'd created the character.

I believe this story to be experimental, a departure from the traditional form of writing and showing a story, so the author tells his story within a story. Perhaps the narrator focuses on the not so exciting elements of the story he's telling and giving us general, uninteresting details.

I want to be thrown over a cliff when I'm reading, just as I want my reader to be unhinged by my writing.

For me, this particular writer's technique doesn't do the goal of showing his primary story any favours. The narrative is tedious and long. I find him chatty and this takes away the gravity of the narrative. The situation in Israeli and Palestine sounds much more fantastic and I wish he would have simply placed the reader directly in the middle of that crisis and not just glazed through this type of telling; giving glimpses of certain incidents with Gabriel and Rafa. I think the story would have held the reader more strongly if the tone and pace were changed. Right now there is no urgency in the narrative, and therefore no reason to invest time and interest at all.

I tried.

I won't speak too much about *my* reading selection; of course I loved the story 'That Baby and the'entire anthology is phenomenal.

The opening paragraph of **Fahavalo** (selected by someone else) is sensational. The reader is caught immediately into a chaotic setting that evokes alarm and concern. You simply just want to be absorbed in further. Devising superb opening lines is essential and impacts the quality for any piece of writing.

I can't believe the incredible insight I am receiving on the course. With each new task my eyes are opened further to what can be done when writing and my own skills are being polished tremendously.

So far the feedback on my reworked assignments has been extremely positive, which is an added plus to boosting my confidence as a writer. I know I'm a story teller, a good one; but what I'm aiming for with this course is good craftsmanship. For me it always proves to be a tricky feat to pull off.

The latest Seminar is probably my favourite so far. I believe I think that about every Seminar until we are given a new one. The point here is that the more challenging the work the better. With this latest assignment I got to do what I love to do with my writing, which is to break the rules. I don't like comfort and I refuse to produce stories readers can predict after the first paragraph. Fiction must thrill whilst maintaining a solid sense of reality right through. The story of Zanele is actually a true story although the conception of her child was not under such dire circumstances. The Coprophilia is an idea that's haunted me since the late nineties when I stayed up way past my bedtime to watch a Woody Allen movie. One of the main characters in the movie was my inspiration for the character of Sizwe in the story. I plan on crafting more material that introduces the reader to silent desires and odd habits.

That's my goal. I'm confident with the piece I submitted and am eager to read what K. Hammerton has to say about the final material.

I am eager to get my hands on more anthologies. So far the anthologies I've come across on the course have done a great deal of work on my senses and have kept me awake. I'm sure and I'm certainly hoping to be attracted to longer novels at some point, but for now the anthologies are great medicine.

The group's feedback session was a great success I think. We are learning to give honest feedback on each other's work now with any fear of sounding judgemental or hypocritical, which has always been my fear. And it does seem everyone is eager and thirsty for positive critique. It's what will help us look at our work from a more neutral standpoint and everyone gets that I think.

I trust this attitude will continue throughout the course.

Still, my Achilles' heel is procrastinating. It's a bad excuse at this stage in the game but it's still a problem for me. With the RJ, my system was to write 100 words a day and not shelf everything for the last minute. I find the RJ is better accomplished if drafted throughout the week instead of doing it all at one go. It gives you a better opportunity to reflect on each aspect of the week and all the tasks you had to do.

This all comes down to better time planning on my part. Planning writing and reading time is a skill on its own, and not something a writer should take for granted.

May 2018

I dove into Matt Bell's HOW THEY WERE FOUND. What I'm appreciating and enjoying is that the books available on the course are sobering and sharpening up my writing instincts. A writer's 'writing gear' should always be on. Within the writer should always be present the desire and ability to craft a great piece of prose.

The type of story that interests me most is a story that I can read, follow, feel a sense of anxiety for, submit myself to and; till the very last word, be unable to predict. At this stage I am keen on reading stories that influence craftsmanship within my own writing. Of course reading for enjoyment is important; however mere enjoyment isn't my main priority.

Whatever I read must challenge me and make me want to work harder as a writer, and destroy any inclination of relying on the same old tricks, vocabulary, form and structure I'm used to. HOW THEY WERE FOUND utilises a unique combination of genres that if you read the collection without knowing the author's name you would say different writers contributed to the anthology. Bell gives each story its own signature. I think that is the key to having a successful short story, and at the end a successful collection.

For example, I've never thought of playing around with existing fairy tales. We simply accept that what happens after 'and they lived happily ever after' is bliss and roses. We never question what happens to Cinderella after she is married to Prince Charming. Does she adjust well to the pressures of royalty; is she a Sarah Ferguson or a Kate Middleton? And what is her disposition towards wealth? There is also the question of Prince Charming. In every Cinderella adaptation he is a pale-skinned, tall, handsome youth on a white horse who is able to sift through an entire kingdom to find his love interest. We are told he is Prince Charming but there is no evidence that he really is as pure as we're lead to believe.

But in WOLF PARTS, Bell gives the entire idea of a fairy-tale as we know it a shakeup. For starters, Little Red Riding Hood is not referred to as 'Little' but as 'Red'. She is presented as a human/real life girl who has her periods and who's suffered abuse at the hands of her father, instead of the one dimensional character who picks flowers and skips aimlessly through the forest to get to granny's house.

Bell's transformation of this well-known children's story affirms what I'm repeatedly learning on the course: there is a lot a writer can do with his pen and paper. By playing so ferociously with this fairy-tale, by showing us the grandmother's desire for tea and wine, her determination of saving her granddaughter from inside the wolf's stomach by eating away at the wolf, is an example of what to do with characters. Characters must have something to do. The short story is an excellent space to see what a prose writer can really do. The challenge with writing short stories, I think, is not to view them as confined spaces; but rather as brief moments in time. A lot can happen in a moment. A life can be made or destroyed, destinies can be changed, and anything can take place in a single moment. A writer shows off his or her skill by painting those moments with an incredible sense of panache and detail. It is with this point of view that I approach my assignments on the course and other writing projects.

A previous assignment we had to compile was labelled 'The Fun Assignment'. In my opinion Seminar 5 Poetics and Narrativity and the essay we're to write *is* the fun assignment. I am so absorbed by all the readings and what each writer has to say. 'The poem is dream, a dream of wish fulfilment...' William Carlos Williams says in his *The Poem as a field of action*. Wow! That title on its own says so much to me: the student of literature and writing. The mundane 'Roses are red, violets are blue' kind of writing is not going to cut it here.

As a prose writer I of course apply the theory of a poem being a dream to prose. For me it speaks to my thoughts of stories being captured moments of time. We are able to create the worlds we want and in turn we evoke positive feelings, hopes and aspirations for the reader. I had not thought how fulfilling it would be to read the thoughts of other writers, their opinions on the craft, besides reading their actual fictional or poetic work. So, as can be imagined, I've made notes upon notes for the essay. I am now motivated to research more about the likes of Kathy Acker and Brian Evenson, writers I've unfortunately, never heard of before.

Just when I start feeling overwhelmed by the course I am quickly strengthened by the insight I receive from everyone involved. In this particular instance, I initially thought I wouldn't cope with Seminar 5 Poetics and Narrativity. I was wrong. Every single piece of reading material I have come across in the reading sessions speaks to why I, firstly, want to achieve this MA, also why I want to pursue writing as a career. We are certainly not going to be the same type of writers, and we are not going to produce the same type of material. What's important for me is to work steadily on my own skill.

I've started doing some writing exercises, as I had said I would weeks before. Because time is never enough, I find the best time to do these is on the morning taxi ride to work on my tablet or my phone.

Something important I picked up during the contact week in February is that a writer should always be writing and reading. So I'm making it a habit to dedicate my free moments to both. I find I also excel at writing in busy spaces, while I observe people. All of the assignments I've submitted so far on the course have been based on real people and true events. I enjoy observing people's lives and looking further into what they don't show the rest of us with my writing.

In his superb introduction to *Forms At War*, R. M. BERRY says 'Literary forms don't cause actions, literary forms are actions.'

A student of creative writing cannot simply breeze past this idea without dissecting it and looking through it from different angles. For me, this defines what writing must do, or rather what must be done with writing.

The further I go on or with the course I am motivated and encouraged to take my writing more seriously. This is not just some hobby anymore, it is life altering work. I am finding, as the months and Seminars proceed, that I am moving almost in a circular motion where I am gathering more discipline, more know-how and refining my writing skills more than I could have ever done on my own.

What do these new realisations mean? They mean that all of this nonsense pertaining to procrastination must be put to rest now. I must set myself on a stage where my purpose for writing can be clearly defined and as Mishka Hoosen said in the last online session, “to have sincerity”. This means I must extract from myself the most concrete evidence to bring forward to the page and to each piece of writing. Only the best parts of what I know and what I’ve experienced must receive my attention as a writer.

As usual, the writers and writing I’m exposed to does it’s best to alter what I think I know about my abilities.

Through *Forms At War* I have come across KIM ADDONIZIO and I must say I do not know what I was reading before I read ADDONIZIO. The humour incorporated in *A Brief History of Condoms* is so thoroughly well done and sublime that I want to discover more of this writer’s work. Here is a clever and witty piece of fiction that is so far removed from the Matt Bell that I fell in love with a few weeks ago but it still ignites my senses and interest in the craft. I felt pins and needles as I read through the unrealistic experiences of the Condom and when I got to the inevitable ‘One Condom’s Story’ the piece jolted my reading experience into another dimension all together. The piece is an excellent example of what BRIAN EVERSON speaks about in *The Crazy Party Guy, Or A Disruption of Smooth Surfaces*; ‘...work that destabilizes the reader...’

Indeed, I felt the need to recuperate after reading ADDONIZIO’s piece. The story presents such a simple object as a condom in such an extraordinary way. In the story there is a dignity and sense a stern sense of human value attached to Condoms, due to the writer giving the Condom a history, a life story and an identity. It speaks to the writer’s creativity, skill and technique. This informs me that it is not always necessary to push for the dramatic extremes to showcase a good piece of writing or a fantastic story, and fiction really doesn’t have to be based on real life experiences; even though, of course, we write from experience. In this piece ADDONIZIO shows the sincerity and the sensitivity Hoosen spoke about. So from any writing theme or prompt the writer should strive to be authentic and bare as possible. I find more evidence of the necessity of being original but minimalistic as possible in MICHAEL J. LEE’s *Last Seen*. The minimal use of punctuation makes the work feel less contrived and authentic. It’s like inverted commas and long dialogue would have made the mother and son’s grief less believable and would strip the reader of any empathy they would have had for them. We therefore see the characters in their grief, we feel the grief as if it is our own, and it’s awake and seething in the dialogue right through to the last paragraph where there is absolutely no punctuation at all. The fancy stuff we incorporate can be clutter sometimes and hinder the work from being what it can actually be.

I appreciate how each Seminar builds into each other. Although I don’t believe I was exceptional at it, I really do understand Mishka Hoosen’s Seminar and brief on ‘Senses’ now that we’ve gone through the online session, a task I don’t think I would have been able to complete if I had not attended the contact week or completed all the prior assignments for example.

From the first to the last word in *Last Seen*, the reader feels, smells and tastes the anguish of both mother and son. It is unquestionable and unbearable and so we are pulled further into the story for we want to reach a safe conclusion or resolution with them. The reader wants to be a part of the characters' healing, of their finding solace and accepting the unbearable truth of the lost and murdered boy. It is interesting how the writer does not present a bloody body or a gruesome scene but just the facts of what the grieving family knows, and what they've been told by police. This again is an example of good, original technique.

Well-crafted stories, those that are written with clear intentions and with purpose, compel the reader to hope for positive and tangible outcomes for the characters.

From the Mishaka assignment I also proved my free writing skills, as the task I submitted I did in one go with no editing whatsoever.

I also managed to get my hands on a copy of *The Fertile Ground of Misfortune: Teaching Practices in Creative Writing*, Edited by STACY HARDY and ROBERT BEROLD. I am spell bound by the ideas brought forward by each of the contributors in this tiny treasure of a book. In relation to myself presently I was interested in MANGALISO BUZANI's *What I Learned as an MA Writing Student*.

BUZANI's experience with his school teacher's methods of teaching writing is quite similar to mine, so when he explains the liberation he found from Free writing I understand him. In high school we were always told to think before we wrote. That type of mind set really hampers the bare, sincere and authentic type of material a person really wants to get to.

July 2018

There are no excuses now. Claiming to be burdened by procrastination will no longer cut it. The second Contact Week, for me, affirms my potential, know-how and skills as a writer. At this stage, I recognise there is an unwavering amount of self-confidence necessary within each of us to accomplish spectacular writing. After all we want to produce MA Degree calibre material. For me, experimentation is important. I write fully conscious of the importance of bringing something new to the craft, something that will hold the reader in and entertain. I believe it is possible to create a completely credible, worthwhile and also entertaining piece of work.

Contact week allowed for many lessons. It would be disingenuous of me if I did not mention how grateful I am for the 'Spit and Polish' and 'Work in Progress' sessions. To be granted the opportunity to look through and analyse other people's work is not only extremely humbling but it is a crucial part of the course. I am humbled by the spirit in which each writer brings their work forward, trusting that he or she is placing their efforts in safe hands for feedback and healthy criticism. The sessions inform me that there is endless space in the writing arena and more importantly each one of us is capable of bringing forward a unique style and signature.

‘When he woke up, the dinosaur was still there.’

I had not heard of this story/sentence before Mr Alan Ziegler introduced us to it during his talk on Short Prose Forms: Straddling Boundaries, nor had I come across his ‘Squibs’ before. A story is what a writer says it is. A prose poem is what a writer says it is. These are thought provoking thoughts or ideas for us writing students. In Mr Ziegler’s example we find that the story/sentence can have multiple meanings depending on how the reader interprets it. So this tells us that no matter how excellent our writing, we must make provision for trusting the reader and leaving space for the reader to do their own analysis of the work. I am also finding that the writing dictates where it wants to go, it has its own set of rules, and my duty as a writer is to allow the writing to go where it wants to. To not restrain my writing by restrain myself, or to form boundaries around the work by forming boundaries around myself; that is the main objective.

An important note I picked up from the feedback sessions at Contact Week: DO NOT WRITE THE WAY YOU SPEAK. It often happens that the writer has not clearly defined or established the narrator’s voice in the piece and naturally the writer’s own speaking and therefore patterns come across in the writing. It is important to differentiate the way we speak from the way we write. I encountered this several times while going through the work of some of my peers during Contact Week. The trick is to be strict during editing, reading the work aloud, letting it sit and coming back to it after a few days. When we give the work a break, or when we distance ourselves from it, we return to the material with stronger objectivity that allows us to make those hard editing decisions.

One of the highlights of the week was Dr. Tinashe Mushakavantu’s talk, ‘Be Your Own Best Editor’.

Often, we write to finish. I know for myself that was usually the case with most of my writing projects. I would race through the work with fixed timelines of getting published and jaded ideas of massive sales. That is where I went wrong many a time. Dr Mushakavantu has emphasised what I had already picked up in the course that the first editor for a piece of writing is the writer himself. Editing one’s own work is an important skill to not only possess but to develop as well.

Looking back on my writing attempts I have made several blunders where I have sent manuscripts to publishers without thoroughly reading through them. I have found countless spelling errors, grammatical mistakes and holes in the narrative that could have been resolved if I’d allowed the work to simmer for a little while before sending it through.

Nothing was more worthwhile for me than Efemia Chela’s “The Art of Short Stories”. I absolutely admire the manner in which she broke down ‘The Husband Stich’. Again, it is not a story that I had come across before, and upon reading it on my own I felt lost and overwhelmed by the narrative.

However going into Efemia's talk and the extensive notes she made on how to view and manage shorty stories, I started looking at the story as a writer as opposed to looking at it merely as a reader. On the first read I missed some of the themes at work within the story. The doubleness, the questioning of truth, honesty and choice all sitting underneath a simple and consistent voice. I might not want to write a story in this form but I am reminded of what sharp writing must do, in particular in short fiction. It's not about being a clever writer. At the end of it all the writing must allow the reader to reach their own conclusion, to answer their own questions about any number of issues surrounding the narrative at hand.

August 2018

I am finding quite useful to comb through the anthologies slowly as I work on developing my form and technique. I am still heavily haunted by the feedback I received for the Nathan and Rondela Assignment where I was encouraged to focus on craftsmanship. I'd like to believe that I am getting better at it and of course I see a change in the way I write but I question if I am indeed doing it correctly. Perhaps once we have been allocated supervisors I will be able to get further input into the writing and will be able to make the necessary changes that will see me improving further.

The free writing activities that I do in my spare time help a lot with assignments as I often find gems in my journals that I use now and then.

I have not yet finished **40 Likely to die before 40**, I am in no rush to either. I return to each story a day or two later to properly dissect it so I might see what the author did and do not do. This allows me to really uncover the narrative and the narrator. It also makes it possible to get a glimpse of what intension the author wished to showcase and the impression he or she might leave on the reader. This past week I have relished diving into Mira Gonzalez's **Love Letter**. It is a fragile, almost sombre narrative expressed and painted in a simple but thoughtful way. Great craftsmanship is being able to say things by showing them and by showing things without directly saying them. By this I mean the characters' motives, inward thoughts and/or desires. Gonzalez does this excellently in this piece, that when we reach the final sentence, we are made to understand that the protagonist will be alright despite her apparent depression and/or inward turmoil.

There is no limit to what can be done with writing. A clear example of this is Andrew Duncan Worthington's piece in **40 Likely to die before 40, Harry Potter As A Sex Guide**. What an amusing and clever piece. Yet I have never thought of writing about another author's character or using elements of someone else's story to create a different story of my own. Worthington, as far as I'm concerned, does it superbly in this extremely short piece. Harry Potter As A Sex Guide is a stand-alone piece, which I think can be defined as flash fiction.

What is interesting to me about it is how Worthington sort of summarizes Potter's life in a humorous way and by the end of it one thinks, 'Oh that was very nice and clever.'

Regrettably, on the other hand, I don't feel the same way about Worthington's **I Am AN Inanimate Object**. With everything I read I have to question intension and purpose. In turn with everything I write I aim to bring forward good intension and purpose. Although there are some wonderful ideas in the piece I just can't find any purpose in it. Perhaps that is the point, judging by the title of the piece, not to have any specific purpose, but to simply just exist as a unique short piece of prose? I don't know.

However I do enjoy the ideas brought across in the piece, the affection the narrator has for his laptop and the idea of spooning and spooning with it shows how attached we are and can be to our devices. I know I possibly feel the same way about my laptop and my phone is the first thing I reach out for when I wake up and the last thing I look at when I go to sleep. So Worthington's piece is not without any base or realistic reference.

I am excited about the Writing in Community assignment. I have put together my two groups and am happy that I've received interest from the people I've identified. The aim I have in mind is seeing what interests' people, especially black people. I see myself as a writer who writes primarily for black readers. Indeed, most of my characters are black South Africans and I am interested in seeing if people outside my writing community find my writing and my characters relatable and genuine. After all I am not just writing for my writing class but for the public at large. Since I will be working with two groups; group 1 are teenagers and group 2 are young adults, I am interested to see and hear the feedback for some of my writing and am also keen on facilitating a writing workshop. Hopefully it will be something I will get to do in the future outside the requirements of the course.

I am also planning my thesis, and I have not yet decided if I should be doing a novella or a collection of short stories. I much rather prefer the first option, but I will rely on the advice of my supervisor for a way forward.

October 2018

What an excellent time I had with my Writing in community workshop! Firstly, I have to say planning the workshop was exciting for me as I had the opportunity to create a class or workshop in my local community where I work. I have long wanted to hold writing workshops in Port Elizabeth, particularly in the townships where reading is not a popular pass time among young people. When I say little reading takes place, I say this judging by how little the local libraries are utilized. So writing workshops, for me, would be the perfect way to get people reading and in turn get them writing fantastic material.

My vision and hope have always been to create this platform for up and coming young writers. Without revealing what I'll present in my report later on, I enjoyed specifically the idea of pushing youngsters to write, motivating them to think outside the box and to approach language in a way they have not thought of before. All of this will be present and more detailed in my report later.

I am also thrilled to hear from my Supervisor, the Fantastic Doctor Mason, that my thesis is on the right track. I've been dreading his feedback on the first few pages I sent to him weeks ago. Self-doubt is an inevitable demon a writer must deal with I suppose. I was mainly concerned about the tone and the believability of my narrator. I am earnestly determined to write a modern and believable South African story that will be an easy and enjoyable research project once completed. I am also certain now that I made the right choice in terms of a Supervisor. I believe Doctor Mason is going to bring out the best in me during this process of creating the thesis.

It has been an incredible week for me indeed. I received confirmation that a flash fiction piece I submitted to REFLEX.COM for consideration will be published on the website. REFLEX.COM is an American website that runs a quarterly international flash fiction contest where a cash prize of 1000 dollars is up for grabs. My story 'They always call you beautiful before they break your heart', is a result of the many free writing exercises I have been doing in my spare time at home. Free writing exercises prove to me that one needs to sit and be determined to write. There is no magic wave that washes over a writer, or writer's block that should hinder a writer from producing work. One simply requires the discipline to sit down and write a well thought out piece of material.

Unfortunately, the piece did miss out on being long listed but my entry impressed the judging panel so much that they decided to publish it. This, I honestly believe, is a direct result of the course. The skills, know-how and guidance I have been receiving throughout these several months have really allowed me to produce credible pieces. In all I create now I look and aim for producing authenticity. Being authentic allows a writer to have a clear voice; no matter the subject matter. Having said this, my thesis will deal a lot with experimentation. I want the work to surprise the reader. I want it to be artistic and to leave the reader with more questions than answers about what the reader knows and what the reader values in their own life.

So I am steadily shaping up my thesis with a variety of questions about the work arising as I do. Questioning myself and the content is good as far as I'm concerned because I have to challenge what I'm saying or what I'm making the characters say. I want my characters to be challenged, that way their points of view can become genuine and real. Our characters, although fictional, need to be able to stand the test of time. When I think of the most successful characters in literature and even television, they are successful because in our minds, they are real people. They have brought across authentic ideas and points of view.

As I slowly engage deeper with the thesis, it is interesting to realise how much impact each of the teachers on the course have played a role in the development of my craft. From the first Seminar right up to both contact weeks, I look back on the notes and I find that I am able to gain further insight from the teachings Stacy Hardy gave back when we first began as well as the most recent Seminars. I've been doing a lot of looking back and reading my past RJs, to find where I wanted to improve and if I have indeed improved.

Looking at how far I have come I am so extremely happy with my progress although I do believe that I could have done more reading than I have been able to but thankfully my Supervisor has been pressing us to write more than anything else.

I have been doing my utmost, but it is so difficult not to picture the finished product as a finished, published book ready for the bookstores and a cosy book launch at NELM. I think it's natural to have a vision of what one is working towards, it keeps one motivated.

It is also important to note how worthwhile reading and assessing other people's work has been and continues to be. My peers on the course are phenomenal writers. The fact that the course allows the facility of going through the work produced by classmates means we can see the impact of the teachings and to also gather further insight and know-how. On this course fellow students take on a teaching role. Not only has this brought us closer to one another but it has encouraged us to take an interest in the development of each other's skills and technique. At this stage my group mates know what I'm capable of, they know my best work and they can tell me when I've missed the mark. That is a skill and opportunity only the MACW course has been able to provide and it has meant a lot to my personal development as a writer.

November 2018

I am moving happily along with my thesis, and as risqué as it is turning out to be I am bringing out everything I have learnt on the course to produce (hopefully) something unique and spectacular. Of course, we've all read many books. A writer today must really dig deep to find something interesting to bring forward and to keep readers interested. We want readers to invest in our work. We want them to be able to relate with our characters, to fall in love with both the protagonist and the antagonist. For me, part of this is keeping the work as contemporary as possible. To achieve this, I am introducing social media as part of the story telling medium.

The novella follows the daily 'unplanned' conversations of my characters either on Twitter or WhatsApp. This challenge came to me early in the year from Stacy Hardy when she recommended a Twitter novel by an author I can't altogether remember now. I love Twitter and of course millions of other people use and enjoy Twitter daily too. I think that part of our lives goes by unmonitored. If we truly evaluated our presence and activities on these social networks we really could examine the type of relationships we form, the manner in which we form relationships and the speed in which we enter into them. These, I think, are all important factors when human nature is concerned.

This novella will comprise of snippets of conversations, pictures (some lewd and graphic) I'm engaging in with various types of people connected to the narrative. Some are willing/knowing participants others aren't. I engage in a conversation as the character and push the exchange from there. This is more spontaneous and original than writing a scripted 'drama' or planning out a story with an outcome. What I want to show here is how people face up to each moment. I'm not interested in the destination my characters or the story will reach. What unfolds within us as we live our lives? That is the broader question my thesis will be asking in a way, and as I am developing it I see that there is a valid place for it in today's social media obsessed culture. For example, our partners, family members and friends are capable and often do engage in emotion relationships online with people they have never met and people they most likely will never meet from across the world. They share intimate and personal details with them because it's thrilling.

Confessing a secret, in particular a dirty secret to someone is much easier than confessing to someone whom you'll face and talk to every day. I've received countless dirty messages, and details from both men and women, of the sexual activities they'd like to perform with or to me.

I always find these exchanges fascinating because people throw caution to the wind and expose the very worst of their thoughts in split seconds after saying 'Hi'.

In the end, I hope and trust it will be something sensational. The ultimate goal is for the reader to reach his or her own conclusions about the nature and mental state of the characters in the work. I have tried with all my assignments to leave the reader unsettled with emotion by the circumstance faced by each character. There's a madness within all of us that is appealing to watch from a safe distance I think.

When it comes to the Reflective Journal I'm often not so enthusiastic as I ought to be. I am one of the people on the course who have been inwardly lamenting the continuation of the Reflective Journal. Honestly the past few weeks I've been struggling with writing them. It turns out my peers have felt the same way and we have joked and vented about RJ's countless times on WhatsApp. The Reflective Journal really becomes a mysterious magic trick one has to conjure up as time goes by, that it ends up feeling like a chore. It took me a while to share this with my peers; for fear of being the only one with this frustration, but it turns out I am not alone.

Yet I dislike complaining and in my everyday life I always look for solutions to problems. Time and time again, Paul Wessels' voice will replay in my head in that subtle yet brilliant manner of his one can't help but admire, reminding that I am in fact a writer working towards a degree in writing and the Reflective Journal requires me to prove that I am a worthy candidate for said degree.

When I apply this point of view more earnestly I come to realise that any difficulty I encounter with developing my Reflective journals stems from pure laziness, lack of planning and perhaps lack of imagination too on my part. This is a creative writing course; therefore, writing of any sort is and should be the order of the day.

This includes the Reflective Journals. Producing the Reflective Journal is as important as producing the assignments and works of fiction that we're expected to produce throughout the duration of the course.

This calls for a renewed attitude on my part on the writing of the Journals each week or fortnight. Not only do the Journals assist in polishing up my techniques, but they also bring me one step closer to better understanding the craft of writing and the role I can play within the environment. They force you to think about your writing, what you have written, how you've written it, what you intend to write and how you will write it.

I am not reading as often as I would like now, I am continuously making notes for the thesis and writing small passages when I have free moments at work. At my writing desk at home the pen just flies through the page but I have been rejecting most of what I come up with so far.

January 2019

It has been so thrilling seeing my work published in Tyhini, an actual, physical anthology. It motivates me further to feel and think like a proper, professional writer. Of course, I have been published in minor journals as well as online. I've also been fortunate to receive prizes and honourable mentions in some writing contests, but I consider my presence in the Tyhini publication as an exceptional achievement in my writing journey.

Also, the feedback I have been receiving from friends and family on the material in Tyhini has been astounding. Bringing something new to the table isn't done without much trepidation and heart palpitations. I've circulated my copy of the book to a few of my friends and they have all been impressed by not only the quality of the collective work but also the experimental nature of my pieces. I always look and ask for feedback. Even when I believe the work is just right, I always want to know where it can be made better. It's important for me to find a balance between what the audience wants to see and what I want to show.

The feedback to my Tyhini pieces tells me that readers relish experiencing something different. As writers we've got to find new and exciting ways of showing our stories and taking readers on new adventures, they didn't think of themselves. I felt the same way when I read some pieces in 40 over 40, also when I came across Chwayita Ngamlana's assignment. A lot of the material we've been using, and reading has had a great impact me and the way I view and approach my writing.

I am therefore proceeding with my thesis reassured that the experimental format I've decided to pursue will not only interest but will come across as authentic to readers. The novella is social media inspired; it will entail graphics and screenshots of various social media platforms and conversations between characters.

Dialogue is important, it helps the writer show the story better, the writer is able to give out all the necessary information about each character in a skilful way through the language and talking style of each character. When this is done successfully the reader gets a clear image of everyone involved and is able to see the differences in people precisely. But what happens when we move away from the traditional method of showing dialogue? I mean the inverted commas and formal punctuation.

I am interested in using 'chats' as a device for displaying conversations and therefore character development. What the characters say and what they do will show the reader that they are growing up or changing. For example, one of my characters in the thesis will be dealing with sex addiction. I plan to reveal this through the character's chats long before the character can confront themselves.

In my research I have also created anonymous social media accounts where I chat with people without either of us revealing our identity. Anonymous communication – made possible by modern technology - makes it easier for strangers to talk to one another freely. We reveal our darkest secrets via social media because we are talking to people we don't know. Apps and social media platforms such as 'freak twitter' are arenas where like-minded individuals 'meet' and 'share' experiences, nudes, and other important information while never actually 'meeting'. This is possible because strangers don't judge us or rather, we don't feel judged by people who don't know who we are. We can't be held for account we're anonymous. I'm fascinated by this type of communication, the language the lack of privacy and urgency involved. Sensitive information is shared instantly, and people reveal their worst sexual desires. I am interested in translating and presenting this in my thesis.

I've tried writing without reading and it does not work. The noted format is reading equals writing. I don't know why; it just works better that way. I don't read much of Steven King, but I love reading his quotes and opinions on the craft. He says, 'If you don't have time to read, you don't have the time (or the tools) to write. Simple as that.'

I miss the urgency and prompts of the assignments. Writing the reflective journals and creating a new assignment is hardly the same thing as one seems to require a different need than the other. The assignments were a stimulant and one was able to think beyond his or her boundaries and limitations as a developing writer. Apart from the thesis I have started writing short stories. This habit has developed from the free writing exercises I used to work through last year. It is possible to uncover a lot of good source material from the scraps one comes up with in the free writing exercises. I'm proud of the skill I've developed through the exercises as they have allowed me to be able to manage a thousand words on a single sitting. The trick is to just let the words flood out any which way they please. In the beginning I used to find it intimidating and could only manage a mere 30 or two to three sentences. I am very happy to say that I have gotten much better at sitting and constructing a story all at once; with the aid of a lot of coffee and concentration of course.

Naturally what follows the output of the story is the process of letting the work sit alone for several days. Maturing it like wine. There are important flavours and bright colours to be found in this process. We revisit the piece with a more objective point of view than when we first began. The first draft is always just the skeleton. It gets blood and flesh from re-reading and editing.

I'm finding that editing is not only important but it can be just as much fun as creating the initial idea of the story because once you begin editing, you begin to give the story new life.

February 2019

My online session group mates; Leigh-Anne, Phili and I continue to share our writing. We share, read and give each other feedback on what works and what does not work within our prose. I find this still incredibly essential and useful. I find that the perspective of an outsider on the territory I've created makes a huge difference to the end product for the story. Fresh and different insight is important.

As I continue with my thesis and my other writing, I repeatedly revisit the notes I've made in the past two contact sessions and the points made by all the teachers. In particular I replay the workshop conducted by Efemia quite a bit. I believe once the thesis is complete I will work on a collection of short stories. Actually, if I'm honest, I have already begun working on it; perhaps it will be a matter of editing and selecting the best work for said collection.

I find that as I write for the thesis, there are some bits and pieces that do not work on what I'm putting together, but they are credible enough to stand on their own; those are the ones I develop into short standalone pieces. I am enjoying this process thoroughly and during my writing moments I find myself wishing I could resign from my day job to write fulltime and to spend my mornings in coffee shops observing strangers as they go by their daily lives, positioning them in my writing as they pass by.

Short stories require much more finesse than a longer or larger work. The action of each sentence must lead the reader into further action, and everything must be accounted for in a short space of time or with a restricted number of words. This creates momentum, pace and allows the story to thrill. I will always see myself as a writing student but the MACW course has awakened the teacher in me.

I recently read a five paged short story by one of the ladies mentioned above. The first thing I look at besides word count when it comes to short stories is the number of pages. Anything above 3 pages irks me but I usually solider on with eager hopefulness. I read the first paragraph and I was happy to find the first three opening sentences so riveting that I simply had to know what was going on further on in the life of these people mentioned in this story. The first paragraph (of about 4 lines) did the necessary work of grabbing the reader by the balls and convincing him to stay.

A reader must read a short story and be satisfied with whatever conclusion the narrative reaches by the last word. This is not to say we should give the reader a happy ending or that the reader must like the outcome. Not in the very least. But the reader must not feel short-changed simply because he or she has read a short piece of fiction. We accomplish this by using every character in the piece and every moment in driving the motives of those characters forward.

If the Rhodes MACW course has taught me anything it has taught me the value of editing and re-writes. To be honest, I look forward to the editing process more than I do creating something completely new from scratch. The editing phase of a work requires all the maturity one develops along the course of a writing career. There is a necessary separation from the characters one spent time developing and getting to know. Vital questions about necessity must be brought forward. Questions about consistency and believability must be asked. The reader must receive a finished life or finished lives. Our characters must be believable.

As a writer, I'm learning that ultimately, I need to be two people all at once. I am first the writer who develops the story and the characters, and then after a few weeks or months, I then become the editor of the work. These two people have different motives, they must give each other breathing room so each can function effectively when required. The editor holds the writer accountable and provides solutions to the questions and holes that prop up after a few reads. That is how we get to keep our sanity and finish our writing projects. There must be a balance.

I wonder if it is wrong to write with a readership already in mind. I know who I want to write for. I know who will enjoy my work, the type of reader who will get it and understand the little cultural biases that pop up within the story. But is this detrimental? I wonder because the books I've read on the course are not books or writers that I would have chosen otherwise but I have enjoyed and learnt so much from each of them.

I'm cheating and reading material outside the prescribed books on the course. In particular I want to read more African authors. In fact I am. I won't mention the books I'm reading now but as I read these books I note the connection I have to the stories and how tangible the humour and experiences of these characters are to me, hence my earlier question about keeping a readership in mind when writing.

The stories are so real and understandable to me I feel I was right there when the author wrote the material. When I finally get published, I want my readers to feel the same, yet I want my books to reach a wider audience. This is the challenge I find myself thinking about as I firmly resolve on the type of material I want to write about. I'm no J K Rowling, I won't be writing the next Harry Potter or Game of Thrones. I like real people in real life with real emergencies and questions on human nature. I want to challenge what we've come to know about the human existence. Maybe the trick is just to take it one day at a time and develop the craft.

## **Experience is the influence of writing.**

I survived my childhood by keeping a journal. Right through my teens, to my mid-twenties, while many of my peers spent most of their time and money at the movies I invested in books and journaling. To this day I am just enthralled by the smell of ink and crisp new pages. On account of my macabre family life, it had been harrowing and difficult to share all the details of my daily life at home and at school with friends, so my journals became my confidants. Also, most of my peers had family dilemmas of their own and in my circle of friends there was no one I could speak to. Back then the writing process required me to seek out quiet spaces where I could gather my thoughts so I could adequately articulate the feelings I wished at any given moment. Writing allowed my thoughts to move at a slowed pace and whatever emotions I experienced were easily consolidated by the noiseless process of journaling. I found that through writing I was able to isolate myself from negativity and to place events or issues into separate boxes in my mind. For example, my mom's boyfriend abusing us, verses my mom's decision to stay in an abusive relationship for ten years when she was fairly capable of an independent existence away from our abuser. When writing, I discovered I was in some form of therapy where I could identify the problems as well as the solutions I needed during the times when I required answers and comforting. It was through writing that I understood; at eleven years old, that my mom stayed with an abusive man only to please the woman who'd raised her, a woman who believed that a single, independent black woman was, as she would put it, 'A fat Chinese person.' One must look extremely hard to find a fat Chinese person as far as my great grandmother and many other black people are concerned. It was also through writing that I understood; at eleven years old, that my mom's boyfriend was no hero and his abusive behaviour was not to be emulated.

My friendship with the pen and paper allowed me to seek out better explanations and to challenge myself to be strong for each moment. Of course, back then I did not know what I was doing. I wasn't writing fiction. I wasn't writing with goals in mind. I was simply sharing my experiences with the only thing I felt comfortable with the page. Yet you would have never looked at me and said, 'That boy comes from an abusive home.'

I had a place where I could go where I disposed of the anger and pain, where I could say what I wanted to say, where I wouldn't be silenced; a seventy two paged exercised book, with feint lines and margins and I loved it.

I now know for sure that my journaling has safeguarded my sanity, my responsible nature and my gratitude for being alive right now. If, during my painful moments, I had plunged myself into a different outlet; if I had exposed myself to a less therapeutic activity, I believe I would be of a different disposition. Like many people I have experienced a lot of disappointment at an extremely young age. I've heard my mom screaming for her life while I stood outside a bedroom door waiting for her boyfriend to tire of beating her, willing myself to be bold enough to blast through and save her so many times. I've been beaten with all sorts of instruments all over my body that I no longer fear physical pain. In fact, there are very few things that I fear; actually, I have to think very hard to truly acknowledge what I fear. I'm not invisible, but I've been brought to a place where I am hardly surprised by human behaviour.

Physical abuse is a form of humiliation and I don't believe I would be such a great conversationalist if I hadn't been through a thorough experience of humiliation. It's easier to bring yourself to the fire when you've been exposed to it before. Yet without me journaling, without me making the effort of putting things in order with myself through writing, I don't believe I would be as embracing of my past as I am today. There is nothing I would change about my past, because each experience has brought me to this juncture of open-mindedness, kindness and patience with others, and I am not grateful because I now have stories to tell. I am grateful because I have lessons to share and it is my many years of writing down my thoughts, writing down my feelings that have brought me to that understanding.

I can say that true, worthwhile writing is made possible by our experiences. We journey through our lives and we create memories. We find ourselves in circumstances we did not choose. We sometimes make bad choices. We undergo transformations, we pursue ambitions, hopes and we inevitably participate in that dubious activity of falling in love. Throughout man's occupation of the world he has found it prudent to record what he experiences. Each generation holds its own method of recording these revolutions. The cave man wrote on cave walls and stone, the nomads on dried animal skin, the Egyptians on papyrus and finally modern man on paper and latterly on electronic devices. The most basic instinct after survival has been to record. In fact, we can say man has survived because man has kept a record of his progress. Each generation has found it important to say, 'This is how we made it.'

Our experiences are our history and our history is our story. Therefore our fiction, our non-fiction, our poetry and prose are in some way based on what we know, what we have seen, what we've experienced. I find this to be true with myself. The best work that I've produced on the Rhodes MA so far has been mostly autobiographical.

*"Poetry that is not restless, that doesn't reflect the streets and the urban poor, poetry that has no time for rural settlements and the youth must be strung of air and must suffocate..."* suggests Mxolisi Nyezwa in a piece he did for New Coin in December 2014.

Nyezwa's statement informs me that writing must have a purpose. Writing must evoke some form of awakening within the reader. A writer should be aware of his ability to shape and encourage social consciousness. What better purpose can there be than to further man's agenda and to propel him forward. By saying 'This is how I made it,' we give our readers the tools to evaluate their own lives, to reconsider their actions and to make better choices. Everybody needs a mirror to look at how they are. Our fiction and poetry serve as that universal mirror. I think the second sentence of Joel Matlou's *Man Against Himself* should be changed from *"The life of a man is very heavy in his bones and his future is a deep unknown grave,"* to *"The life of a **writer** is very heavy in his bones and his future is a deep unknown grave."*

Unless a writer has already achieved some form of success, one can never predict the fruitfulness of a writing attempt. The thirteen or so publishers who rejected J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter must really hate themselves today. As writers we do not know where the work will go, what it will do within the readers psyche but what we must hold on to is good intent.

*“Beneath reality, there is always fantasy: the writer’s task is to reveal it, to open it out, to feel it, to experience it,”* says Marechera in *The African Writer’s Experience of European Literature*. For me Marachera’s ideal supports Nyezwa’s notion that poetry must be restless, reflect the streets, and the urban poor. The challenge is to do this successfully, with prudence. The human experience is not replete with tragic moments simply because life’s a bitch, as popular culture and most media leads us to believe. The task of revealing the fantasy in reality or the humour in sadness, of hope in horror, of light in darkness is accomplished by one who has experienced harsh realities, bleak sadness and the worst horrors imaginable. We do not get where we want to be as writers overnight. We do not produce the calibre of material that ravages the status quo on the first attempt. That tells us we should gather up all the insight we can to assist the development of our writing prowess. *“Poetry should astound and frighten, not make you giggle for two seconds,”* says Linh Dinh in *What I Usually Say to my Students*.

Yang Wan-Li also makes an incredible amount of sense to me when he says, *“A man doesn’t go in search of a poem – the poem comes in search of him.”*

Our varied experiences open up new thought processes and as we engage further with life, with other people and the world we are made to understand that we are much more similar and singular than we are different and simple. From this we know that writers do not belong in comfort zones. Writers should be where the wind wreaks the most havoc. They should be on the alert for when the Sun and Moon battle over possession of the heavens.

Dwayne Betts says, *“...when writers refuse to engage in ideas, everything verges on a minstrel act: a performing of a past performance.”* When we live through certain experiences, we gain the expertise to relay those stories for we have the know-how.

Experience is knowledge. Aime Cesaire informs us of Poetic Knowledge; I think a writer should write and seek out his or her own writing voice until he or she has tapped into their Spiritual Knowledge. We can describe Spiritual Knowledge as the mental and emotional tools we have acquired that enable us to deal and manage our lives in a balanced and fruitful manner. Our sense of right and wrong if you must. When we share this knowledge, we foster peace and healing to those that seek it out in written word. After all, we write with good intentions. We write to relieve ourselves of our burdens, to expose our healing wounds but also, we write to share the little wisdom we’ve collected.

For me, when Charles Baudelaire [1821 – 1867] says, *“You must get drunk,”* he is not prompting us to indulge in wine, but rather to be raptured by a passion and a purpose. Many people think and believe that everything happens for a reason. I am of the same opinion. I believe whatever path a person might be on, whether they have chosen it or not, is the path they *must* be on. It is necessary to allow the idea of who we think we are and what we think we are meant to be doing with our lives to be challenged. There is no ‘better time’ or ‘happier time’ to come. *This* moment requires our presence. This moment requires our gratitude. This moment has teaching qualities and as writers we must be open to the lessons of the moment. Therefore, this moment requires our writing.

Superman does not pretend to be Clark Kent because he loves journalism or because he needs a salary. Superman pretends to be Clark Kent because (a) he loves Lois Lane: his passion, and (b) he wants to be in the centre of information so he will be better suited to help others: his purpose. By finding our passion and by exploring our purpose, we develop our superpowers. As writers, our superpower is the most extraordinary of all. We get to open the reader's mind. Writers have the ability of getting even the most worn mental machinery invigorated once more to face the world.

I wish I'd come across Linh Dinh's *What I Usually Say to My Students* when I was twenty-one. What I now know for sure is that I would have been better served by guidance and advice with regards to my writing earlier on. "*Hoard your time,*" she says. This piece of advice is most crucial to me because I procrastinate more than I can afford to. Through the Rhodes MA course I am learning that the root of my procrastination is slight feelings of inadequacy as a writer. I already know I'm a good story teller, but storytelling and writing literature are two different beasts; so when Linh Dinh says, "*It's okay to write badly, even foolishly but don't try to pass off crap you yourself are disinterested in,*" she speaks directly to me. Of course I don't aim to write badly, but what I must come to terms with is that more often than not I *will* write badly but that shouldn't scare me away from the practice of writing.

*"Sometimes words come hard – they resist me till I pluck them from deep water like hooked fish; sometimes they are birds soaring out of a cloud that fall right into place, shot with arrows, and I harvest lines neglected for a hundred generations, rhymes unheard for a thousand years."*

Nothing describes my doubts and certainty better than this passage from Lu Ji's *The Art of Writing*. My doubt and my certainty influence why, how and what I write. I think once a writer is able to establish what pulls him or her to the pen and paper, as well as what hinders when the dreadful procrastination creeps in, that writer will be better suited to manage not only their writing time but their writing skill as well.

By writing and sharing what we know, we define and articulate our experiences. We put ourselves in a teaching position and our readers obtain from us the tools and courage to move forward more confidently with their lives. Joel Matlou's *Man Against Himself* is evidence that life is hard, but in the absence of companions or mentors, we can take comfort in the fact that we have the written experiences of writers to learn from.

Experience is defined by perspective. Despite the horrible abuse I endured as a child I don't believe I had a horrible childhood. Horror is not the perspective I choose to hold in my mind and in my heart because horror is not the story of my life and it is certainly not the theme of my writing, or a genre I am interested in. Of course, my writing shakes things up, it unsettles, and I will never be a conservative writer, but I choose to bring to the table a positive perspective for the reader's sake.

The Superhero cannot arrive at the war with absolutely no consideration for the innocent bystanders who must be saved. The Superhero uses his or her powers to safeguard the vulnerable, as should each and every writer. Our responsibility as writers is to bring the reader into a positive thought atmosphere. It is through those positive thoughts that our readers are motivated to uncover their own passions and purpose. A sharing of experiences is a sharing of mental and emotional tools, of courage and hope.

Because we become what we think, as writers we must aim to ignite positive perceptions in a balanced manner through the work we produce.

In *I love rumors about black men*, Dwayne Betts says, “...*the truth of it is that writers imagine a world, imagine worlds, and in breathing life into them set the stage for readers to discuss what they want to discuss.*”

The words ‘breathing life into’ indicate the seriousness of the writer’s task and duty. We put ourselves forward as writers, as the Superheroes of literature and the creators of new worlds to allow the reader to grow and thrive within the work. The work is the reader’s mirror. The reader invests time reading through hundreds of pages to find the emotional tools and identify spaces where the writer, the writer’s characters have said, ‘This is how I made it.’ Once the reader discovers concrete evidence of survive, he or she is exported to newer heights of self-analysis.

To excel at bringing the reader to a point of positive change, writers must surely put themselves through hot coals. A process of intense self-examination is therefore necessary.

We do this by reading more intensely, by taking short courses or furthering our studies.

Putting yourself through hot coals means as a writer you place yourself in a position where you will eventually be capable of deciphering the messages of the time and articulating the lesson of each experience. So those little necessities such as editing and critiquing one’s own work are compulsory.

I’ve found that I edit my work best while I’m reading through new material, by authors I had not preferred or known before.

I’ve entered many writing contests and paid extensive entry fees only to revisit my submissions with dreadful horror later on, asking myself how the hell I’d even thought of sending such garbage without re-reading and checking for small errors and plot holes.

When I first started writing seriously, I thought I’d make it on talent alone. My initial rejection letters contained phrases such as ‘You certainly are a good storyteller’. I interpreted the compliment as ‘You’re good but *we’re* going with something else’ instead of ‘You’re good but *you* need to work on a few things to improve’.

I’d been the best essay writer in high school. My classmates had parted with their lunch money on more than one occasion for my A+ calibre essays and short stories, so I believed I would reach that Stephen King standard of success fairly quickly. In full pursuit of a publishing deal I’ve submitted the same manuscript to different publishers without doing much editing or paying attention to the advice publishers would send after assessing my manuscripts. Five to six years ago I was a stubborn writer, not willing to listen to the opinions of experienced industry professionals. Rejection after rejection I failed to identify what I was doing wrong and over time I became less keen to write.

But the urge to write in someone who has been brought forward to share his and other people's experiences does not die down. It seethes within you during quiet moments. The urge to write creeps under your skin and meanders through the veins till it fills your entire being. It's inescapable, that is why we must prepare and fix ourselves for the process. As Brian Everson says in *The Crazy Party Guy, Or, A Disruption of Smooth Surfaces*, "*The work that I want to do is work that destabilizes the reader gradually but profoundly, in a way that he or she can neither prepare for in advance nor recuperate from afterward.*"

To accomplish phenomenal work, a writer should embrace their experiences and enter into more of a conversation about who they are and what they've been through. In doing this a writer creates real characters that readers can identify themselves in and thereby invest unreservedly in the work.

## Writing in Community Assignment.

### Introduction.

My interpretation of this assignment is quite literal; taking writing into the community. I therefore wanted and planned to create a space where the craft would be explored, debated and engaged with. It had always been a dream of mine to develop a literary magazine or writing workshops that would promote the work of young people in the Eastern Cape. But writing, and by default; reading are not popular pastime for many young people especially in the townships.

Libraries are mainly used these days for the free Wifi, and an alarmingly small number of young people read books for enjoyment.

I made notes carefully considering my options regarding where I could start. I wanted to uncover what was going on in the imaginations of young (in particular black) people in 2018. Could they articulate themselves away from the ease of social media? Also, was my own writing relatable? Could they participate in free writing exercises and produce material on a whim?

As I sat and crafted the most suitable approach for this activity, I came to decide on three main questions to be answered by myself at the end of the task.

1. What kind of writer did/do I want to be?
2. How true is the belief I have carried for years that experience is the influence of writing?
3. Who exactly am I writing for?

### Methodology.

1. I approached the English teacher at Ndyebo high school in Motherwell, Port Elizabeth where I briefed the Matric class about my assignment and requested volunteers who would participate in a session.
2. We then decided on a time and venue most suitable for the group.
3. Twelve young participants availed themselves.



### **Workshop detail.**

1. Workshop facilitator: Mr Siya Ntsumpa
2. Expected Outcome from participants: A short piece of writing and questionnaire
3. Duration of the workshop: 1 hour
4. Reading material: Assignments by Mr Siya Ntsumpa submitted for MACW Course.
5. Share topics for free writing exercises.

### **Findings.**

I found the group of teenagers easily excitable. My content so far in my assignments has been highly provocative and sexual and the group was easily captured by this element of the work.

However, I wanted more insight on what direction to take with the different narratives than to merely excite these teenagers' sexual appetites.

I presented them with the assignment we did for experimentation purposes with the social media format and the regular prose short story which is more of the traditional format they are used to.

I found that my experimental work was more challenging for this age group. This worried me somewhat, as a lot that was unsaid in the text was lost on them and they were unable to fill in the necessary gaps that I had left open for the reader to fill out independently. Of course, this is understandable considering the age group and the newness of this format to the group.

### **The Free Writing Exercises.**

After reading through and discussing a short story, we engaged in two free writing exercises. I introduced two topics; 'what I saw' and 'things I love'.

The first round of free writes was not successful. The group had not participated in free writes before and they were quite self-conscious about their material. I had anticipated this as I have worked with teenagers on numerous occasions, so after the first free write we resumed some reading. Once the group consumed some experimental work, they were more open to sharing their material in the session. Love and romance were topics that came more naturally to them. Again, this is understandable for this age group as they are teenagers after all.

The group was enthusiastic and eager about the session. They engaged with the work and they gave great insight on the two assignments I shared with them.

### **Conclusion.**

From the twelve matriculants who took part in the session I am happy to say that one approached me a few days after the session requesting me to mentor him in his writing journey. I have been receiving and reading his work on occasion since then and I am constantly amazed at this young man's brilliance.

We write from experience. I firmly believe we can only bring to life what we know and what we believe. From this session with this writing group I have also learnt the importance of making my material as accessible as possible. In no way do I aim, or should any writer aim to be crass, but I think it is necessary to be accessible and in that way the writing stays authentic.

