

**Thesis**

**(English language portion of dual language submission)**

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### **Abstract (English)**

My English half-thesis comprises semi-autobiographical short stories based on my own lived and observed experiences of patriarchal township life, but told through the eyes of others, often those who find themselves victims of societal ills and cruel injustices. The stories deal with issues ranging from rape culture, intimate femicide, social patriarchy and the vulnerability of women, children and people living with disabilities in such settings. Refusing didacticism, I seek to voice the complexity, bravery and beauty of my characters. I draw influence from Joel Matlou's simple narration of the small details of daily life, Can Themba's ability to find humour in the everyday, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's contemporary sass and Irenosen Okojie's unconventional, subtle and deeply enigmatic approach to storytelling.

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## **Foul Soul**

Guilt comes in holding a tray on which a closed dish is set and a cloth presumably to wipe my hands. I crumble and start weeping. *“At least you won’t be alone, we’ll keep you company.”* That’s what they said to me, Guilt and Conscience. Naughty twins. Am I so gullible. Look at the vultures hovering above my troubled soul, between the not-so-distant past and the looming future. I discern no grain of hope. The hyacinth of my ugly, brutal past threatens to bind and drown me in the flood of her tears. In panic like the maniac that I am. I start clutching at each and everything I come across. I try screaming for help, through my mouth my voice springs in somersaults and escapes me. Just to sit in front of the speakers. My voice comes and whispers something about proclivity for dispensing pain. Now I see Sorrow approaching with some sharp edged questions. Each time he asks the question cuts through my skin and I bleed. Up until now I had not noticed that I was standing on a plastic tumbler, and I was bleeding into it. I look at the breast of the firmament and there she was being lullabied by an angelic voice. I summon my voice to shout and ask for forgiveness. The words spew out one by one dressed in army fatigues and they paraglide in front of my teary eyes.

Like inebriated souls, the words start doing an out of tune number. Now I am hordeed by people who are indecisive whether to stay or to leave. This exacerbates an already perilous predicament. *“Damn, do I still see myself as a human?”* The seizures return like clamps and my heart beats fast. I feel a sudden rush of blood about to sprout out my nostrils. I feel like a leper, a castaway. Seeing my capsized boat far and beyond reach, my ears become blunt and dimly my eyes become rheumy and myopic. This leaves with a taste of bile in my throat that threatens to asphyxiate me. Am I a beast to all of womanhood? Each time I think about that irksome and spiteful day, my head balloons out of proportions. It is beyond bursting point with thoughts. My heart suffers incessant seizures. My eyes are fogged with guilt and I slide my head between my palms. The same hands that were meant to caress, fend for and protect. Look now they are caked with blood. *“What good is a man who uses his God-given strength to terrify women?”*

The one you claim to love *nogal*, but cowers like a petrified dog when confronted by other men. Prurient thoughts invade the corridors of memory. I am emboldened by a feeble thought that at least she is not here. That's the fervent lie I constantly console myself with. Now I watch as my thoughts march on like soldiers to a battle. I take a cursive glance at the vase and again happy thoughts invade my now resentful mind. They leap with joy as I think of our first kiss, our night of the tryst. I will definitely reach out to her and beg for forgiveness...

## Telepathy

It was the early hours of the morning; you know when the whole township is pre-occupied by the preparations of yet another Monday. Everyone oblivious of or intentionally ignoring Eskom's habitual load-shedding. This has become a norm. Some were still yawning and stretching lazily about. Some were fidgeting about in their minds in somnambular sloppiness. The whole wretched township was woken up by a sudden and shrill scream. It pierced through the township's damned soul. I guess everyone abandoned whatever it is they were doing to peer and find out the cause of such disturbance. My grandmother was busy ironing our school uniforms. On hearing the scream, she simply switched the electric iron off. Unplugged it from the socket and left. Perhaps she too didn't want to be left out on the day's mishaps. We were still bathing you know. Myself and my cousin Phumzile. We used to bathe on the same water on the same bath at intervals. One would start by washing their face, the head and use the washing rag to wipe whilst the other is busy reciprocating the process. Because he was the last one to finish bathing, he had to take the water and spill them onto the drain. I was busy applying *Vaseline blue seal* on my face and admiring image on the mirror, when suddenly Phumzile bolted in as if somebody were pursuing him. "*Yizobona mfondini, nanku umntu ulele phaya.*" "*Phi ngoku sani?*" I asked and followed him at the same time. We were about to turn around the corner facing the toilet, when suddenly my grandma's voice: "*Hey nina nobabini! Niyaphi?*" We never even proffered an answer, we just stood there embarrassed and perplexed by the crowd gathered in the yard. For curiosity's sake we managed to steal a glance at whatever their astonished gaze was fixated at. Whatever the matter, it had to do with the person lying oblong against the toilet wall. We were to learn later that it was Zukiswa's father who was lying there. He had taken some laxatives the day before, so this meant that he had had to to-and-fro the toilet the whole night. As he was coming out of the toilet, he met his fate at the hands of some scrap-metal thieves. They thought that he was out to catch them. They stabbed him one hole in the chest and that was it. He was gone. His wife became anxious after a while and went to check what was delaying him. And lo and behold there he was lying dead on a Monday morning. The police, when they arrived and no one knows who summoned them. They cleared the area by chasing people away from the corpse. The efficacy of the township's communication systems. Three police-vans and a private police vehicle. They called the forensics and pathology division. Now the whole neighborhood was gathered in our yard. So many people. You would think that they were going to eat the

corpse. Excuse my bluntness. But in the township if you see a conglomeration, it's either a cow has been slaughtered or there is a funeral. The police cordoned off the area, and some were busy asking questions to the bereaved. Other people were busy concocting this or the other story about what had happened. Away from the ears of the police of course. They feared being hauled for questioning. We sat there in the house, our hearts pounding through our chests. We waited for grandma to finish ironing our uniforms. We were contemplating not going to school, though we dared not say that loud. We had our own rivalry. We were competing each to be in grandma's good books as we both knew what that meant on pension day. It meant a bucketful of niceties, plus if you were lucky another pair of shoes or whatever she felt you needed. We were startled from our day dreaming by the police siren. It is said that the pathology division guys had taken the body and they together with the police then departed. Still no sign of grandma. We stayed until at about eleven. She came and scolded me for not finishing off the ironing. *"I am not sure that I can use the iron. What if I burn the clothes, Gogo?"* She dismissed us with a sigh, *"Go and play outside, you will go to school tomorrow."* Soon as she said those words we were outside running. We wanted to go behind the house and see. We saw grandma wrapped in her shawl, she was headed towards Zukiswa's homestead. She was going there so she can offer condolences and sympathize with Zukiswa's mother. So we were left to our own devices. You can imagine what mischief brewed in our individual heads.

## Visitations to The Other World

### I. Visitations

It is a morning of anxieties, the one that makes you want to stay indoors and forbid yourself seeing the outside world and all of its gloom. The weather is wild and unconstitutional/ as if it is spewed by the cauldrons of hell.

The elders were sitting in a semi-circle in what appeared to be a kraal. There was a bovine smell resplendent of cow-dung. One of the elders was busy filling his pipe with tobacco. He was too preoccupied by this action and oblivious of the orator. What I noticed was that they were all dressed in blankets of dissimilar animal skins, perhaps the disparate totems of their accords. Some had the yellowish-brown and velvety black stripes of the tiger, there was the spotted leopard, the golden-maned lion, the black and white zebra. The patterned brownish-black skin of the giraffe was spread on the floor. There were other assortments of indistinct animal skins, perhaps the less significant of the pact. My guide and host signaled for me to kneel on the skin of the giraffe. Upon noticing me, the orator began by clearing his throat of any spittle: *“I can see that we have a visitor from the world of the undead, perhaps he is heralding news for us. I wish for him to know that we do not take kindly to outsiders, for what happens here is sacrosanct and cannot be relayed to the undead. Are we clear?”* I remember nodding vehemently. *“Since you are not of this world, you will have to undergo the cleansing and initiation ceremony. Your guide and host will show you the ropes. Now if you will excuse us, these matters are sensitive. As I was saying to you they need to be attended to hastily and without a hint of hesitation. The hunters have now become the hunted, beasts of prey are marauding in our habitat...”*

My host and guide signaled for me to follow him and I did in obeisance. I followed him closely for fear of getting lost in this strange land. He told me that we were going to the river. *“Whereabouts is that, if you don’t mind me asking.” “Don’t worry, I’ll take you there.”* We started on a footpath and down a beaten path on the shrub. There was an aromatic smell of rotten leaves and moist soil. The trees with their funny branches, that grew upwards. They had yellowish green leaves. We passed a field with people tilling it. They were in pairs of three and where there were two and there was one passing by, he left whatever he was doing to lend a helping hand. I was still trying to get my head around this unusual arithmetic, when I bumped

into my guide and host. *“I can see that you are surprised by our ways, come now you will get used to them.”*

At this moment I was suppressing the urge to ask where we were? We walked up a slope and past some dilapidated and pockmarked buildings. *“This was your grandpa’s homestead, before his ascension, and this was the hearth. We used to enjoy your grandma’s home baked bread...”*

...There were kids playing innocently around a well. The well was beautifully dug and surrounded by a stone wall. The weather was warm, so what they did is that one person was a guard to the well while others will try to get some water out of the well without him noticing. Should he find out he will pursue those who try to extricate water from the conduit. The first one to be caught, now it would be his turn to guard the well. The game would go on until the old woman summons the kids for their midday meal. There everyone was related. There was not the individualistic character of the land of the Wilderness. The children played, ate, worked and even erred together. There a parent bore a child for another, raising children was a communal thing. The children left their beautiful game and went into the house. Silence...

*“We have arrived at the river. Now all you’ve got to do is to strip naked and I will smear this powdery medicine all over your body, then you will wash it downstream. It is itchy, please try not to scratch.”* I did as told, not so much as a question asked. I stripped naked smeared the powdery medicine and went downstream to wash. When I was done washing I went to put on my clothes. My guide and host now told me that we are going to the “Forest of Silent Whispers.” I asked him why it was called the Forest of Silent Whispers? He replied by relating to me the legend of the forest, and how he grew up listening to different stories about the forest. We were going there for my initiation. My guide and host was not too explicit about this initiation process. Now I was feeling a bit scared.

## **II. The Other World**

We took a different path from that we came through. My guide and host leading as always. I noticed that he was lean to a point of thinning out, with huge hands and feet rather disproportionate to his thin alluvial body. Around his neck he wore a beaded necklace with a little horn dangling from it. When he noticed me staring at it he hid it under the sheep-skin he wrapped himself with. We soon arrived at the forest and the place was as fear inducing as the

tales told about it. We encountered a troop of monkeys jumping from tree to tree with enthusiastic glee. We also stumbled on a herd of wildebeest, some springboks and zebras galloping. My guide and host now signaled me to halt. *“Why are we stopping now?”*

*“Shhh! Softly now. You will wake the beasts?”*

*“What beasts?”*

*“The beasts of the forest, the hunters. Then I will have to sound this horn to chronicle their awakening.”*

We looked for a spot where we would be able to make fire, then we gathered dry woods and logs to make the fire. We were to spend the entire evening there for my initiation. Again in the morning my guide and host will sound the horn to chronicle a new day and that meant my acceptance into the other world.

### **The teacher, Miss Dube**

She couldn't speak our language, well let's just say that she wasn't that fluent, she was Zulu. But then she understood it. That did not stop the kids from mocking her, making fun of the way she mispronounced some words. It was childish foolishness. They were pranksters. One day a boy in her class brought a dead alligator in class. No-one knows how and why he did it, but then he did. That God-forsaken thing stank, never mind it being scary as hell. The whole class was redolent of the stench. So the kids were clustered in one corner of the class, some held chairs as shields whereas others climbed on top of desks screaming their lungs out. Miss Dube heard the commotion as she was coming to class and hurriedly came to see what was the matter. She, being shocked by the fact that the kids congregated in one corner asked what was wrong? Were they feeling cold? They say there's something about people's eyes, they have a tendency of betraying their owner by looking towards the direction of the culprit. So the kids kept looking towards Liya's desk.

Well Miss Dube decided she would find herself what was the matter. So she summoned Liya to come to the front immediately. Liya dragged his shoes and shuffled about in his desk, never coming forward.

“Liya do you want me to come and haul you off from your desk this moment?”

“No, Miss.”

“Then why are still seated when I said come to the fore, now?”

Miss Dube clearly got flustered. What irked her even more was the boy's cheekiness. So she started towards the boy, but she took a few paces and halted. “What is that?” she enquired.

“Take that thing out of my class at once?”

She took a slow step backwards. She did not want the kids to notice that she too was scared of the alligator. Liya stood-up from where he was sitting, kneeled and pulled the alligator by its tail. It's head shook and the kids started screaming again calling on their Mamas and Papas. They jumped from desk to desk some falling on the way, some being trampled upon during the stampede. Miss Dube moved out of the way when she noticed this egress of kids. She rapidly stepped aside as the onrush approached her and they all bolted for the door. All this while Liya is

in spasms, rivers of tears rolled down his cheeks. The boy was oblivious of the casualties this his prank had claimed. Miss Dube so agitated she was shaking. She neither uttered a word nor call the culprit. She just off and went to the Staff-room. It is said that she went to her office and prayed and wept for this disturbed soul. She begged God for his deliverance from whatever evil possessed him. None of the kids knew who alerted the principal, but he was there in no time at all. The first thing he did was to confiscate whatever was threatening the lives of the pupils. He then ordered Liya to go home and come back tomorrow with either parent of his. He sent one of the kids to call the Clerk with the First – Aid kit. So they both attended to those who sustained minor injuries, those who looked serious were taken by an ambulance to Settler’s Day Hospital for immediate attention. The alligator was then put in a container and given back to Liya, what he was to do with it no-one knows.

On the following day the kids anxiously waited for the arrival of Liya and his parent. School went on as usual. They gave up when it was long-break, for they knew that time had ran out for him to arrive. It is either Liya did not relay the message to his parents or they were being damn disobedient and did not care much about their son’s education. Or perhaps Liya did not have parents at all. Since then everyone was asking questions about Liya, for since then he never set foot at that school again and as for Miss Dube she was never a victim of those taunts again.

## Seizure

The thought struck him on his way to the apartment. Being unsure whether it is a thought or a gut feeling, he felt crazy. It was crazy. Perhaps the image he saw reflected on the mirror was not his, a mirage of a fevered imagination or a reflection of rheumatoid dementia. He was stark naked. The mirror mistakenly reflected, but how? Had someone beaten him in coming to the mirror? Was the mirror holding on to that person's image to prove a point to him? He would ask his friend just to get a second opinion. The one who insists on using a fork and a knife when having a Greek salad. Without a knife maybe, or with no fork, or without both. They would eat nonetheless. This was neither here nor there. What does it matter?

The mirror. It was a gift from the Chinaman for whom he used to slave. He resented that. Working for a foreign national that paid him peanuts. "Monkeying. It is called monkeying," the voice proffered. It was his conscience alluding to the spitefulness of the situation. He had the notion that his conscience was too forward. So forward it even offered unsolicited wisdom. The mirror was a framed glass with stains at the back. They both knew that it was the only thing that connected him to the Chinaman. The stains resembled the colours of the rainbow. When he went to the mirror, he least expected to see his own nudity. That of the Chinaman yes, but not his own. The Chinaman being a sole proprietor and the first owner of the mirror his image should be lingering somewhere in the mirror's simplistic magic reflection.

Back to dementia. The thought-cum-feeling-cum-dream-turn to nightmare. He was chased by blood-lusting thugs. He ran. The blood-lusting mongrels were in hot pursuit. He could feel the warmth of their breaths on his back, right between his shoulder blades. He ran even faster. His t-shirt was soaking wet. Now his jeans were beginning to dampen. He increased speed. Everything flew past him. The balls of his feet itched and ached. He must stop. He must stop panicking. He must stop fleeing and face the thugs once and for all. He let out a scream after which he felt rejuvenated. He felt ready to defend himself. He doesn't like fighting, even as a last resort. He turned to face his assailants.

They'd caught-up with him. He had to act swiftly, he launched a roundhouse kick that caught the first assailant on the side temple. Thud. So fell the thug. The second assailant was caught midriff by a forward snap kick, he staggered back. He again lunged forward and was hit across the chin with a straight punch. He sprawled backwards. Blood sprout from his gaping mouth. The first

thug regained consciousness and pulled out a knife. He hated knives. That is why he never carried one. His palms were sweating.

He quickly shook-up and went to the mirror. He stood there forlornly when he discovered that the mirror was broken. He was staring at the frame. He looked at his hands and saw the wounds. In his angst he had broken the mirror by punching several times before the seizure...

...He went for the medicine cabinet and reached for his prescription pills. Sadistic doctors at the public health facilities. Why did they prescribe such toxins? Are they in a secret mission to wipe out the Darkies from the face of the earth? He must breathe. He must breathe before another bout of seizure. These seizures would see the end of him, before any bout he would have the same series of dreams of him being under attack. "Paranoia. It is called paranoia." Again his too forward conscience. He took out a packet of tablets and shook out two, closed the packet and tossed it into the cabinet.

He swallowed the tablets successively and took a glass of water. He immediately felt the drowsiness but ignored it a bit, just to clean the wounds at the back of his hands. He went to the kitchen sink and rinsed them, after which he bandaged them by himself. People are so discriminate and prejudiced against those living with disabilities, though he did not consider his current predicament as a disability. He saw it as an unfortunate setback, that's it.

He was furious about the state of affairs regarding those living with epilepsy. At least with his Standard Eight secondary education, he understood things better than most of the so called "able-bodied counterparts." Maybe he did or perhaps not, it doesn't matter now he has to get some rest. The drowsiness is getting the better of him. Zzzzzz!!

## **Longing**

*After reading "The Rose that grew from Concrete" by Tupac Shakur*

There are things I'd like to think I've outlived, then there are those I'd like to think not. I hate the thought of myself as a simple flower with petals in full bloom. But what can one do with all these nasty feelings? I mean you can't just discard them, or simply up and go. Especially if you were in my predicament. I hear people call it a blessing, it's a curse if you ask me. Growing in such solitude, with only unkempt shrubs of no particular description. Damn! To call it a blessing. Blessing my roots, for I am forever rooted in this place with the horrid stench.

Every morning I am roused by the soft droplets of dew. Refreshed, I turn my pinkish-yellow face towards the eastern horizon eager to embrace the sun's rays as it veers through the misty mountains. Slowly I stretch my leaves revealing my lithe stem, listening to the birds singing their morning hymn grateful for yet another day. Time ticks, no morning visits from the bees, butterflies or even the birds. At least not yet. Those who persevere are yet to be disappointed, so I wait. I gaze around me and feel disillusioned. The spindly shrubs near me are so dry they're on the verge of waning.

Now the sun is on its zenith. I watch the butterflies flying from flower to flower as if tasting the juices of the disparate pollens. Bees Hum on nearby trees. I am waiting hopefully for a single visit. None. My hope inwardly dwindles too. I squint, yearning for the possibility of pollination. My bulbs overflow with fertility and my petals sprout over. I lust over that pit-pat of butterfly wings, or just a little tap from the beaks of the birds to open my sacs. I do not blame the birds, the bees or even the butterflies. Perhaps they are still puzzled by my audacity, my strength and conviction to grow on this concrete wall. An act on which I had neither choice nor say.

Sometimes I'd like to think it's the smell they find repulsive or maybe my habitat is just displeasing and unappealing to them. My popularity is with humans and not my kith and kin. My admirers are perpetually waxing lyrical. I hear there's a poem written about my heroics. It's the stuff that makes one blush. I envy the usual kind of flowers though. They sprout, grow and broom with not as much provocation. There are times when I think about my popularity and just wish I too was plain and simple, not complicated and difficult. I guess you don't choose where you're born.

## Tongues

The fire threatened to consume the whole house. Its tongues licked. People, certainly neighbors ran with buckets of water to quell those angry flames that were corroding the roof. The smoke filled the township. From “D” Street down to Silvertown. The air lifted with burning flesh mixed with the contents of the house. It reeked as if someone had immersed a dead animal in the fire, but who would commit such gruesomeness? Again, the township’s communication system proved its efficiency. The Fire-brigade and the police arrived at respective intervals. But the people had managed to quell the most ravaging of flames.

With swift efficacy, the Firefighters pulled out a hose from their truck, faced the nozzle to the flames. The water was so strong that it immediately blew what was left of the roof sky-ways. It sagged, about to give-in as a result of being scorched. The rafters that supported the roof were torched and so were the wooden frames of both doors and of the windows. Surprisingly enough the firm structure of mud and stick seemed unscathed, save for a few chunks here and there that showed some burn marks. Now that the fire has been extinguished successfully, the question lingered in everybody’s mind. “Where are the occupants of this house?”

The Firefighters tried to enter but the smoke prevented them. It became an insurmountable task to see inside. They had to wear some specialized regalia/equipment to enter. Meanwhile the crowd was gaining momentum. People wanted to see for themselves what had befallen the occupants. The police in turn barricaded the immediate vicinity with danger tapes. People started booing and howling. After a long pause and some “*boings*”, “*Oh! Shames*” one of the firemen came out carrying a bundle of what seemed like a corpse. It was wrapped in charred remains of a duvet. Screams and moans were heard from the crowd. The bundle was put on the lawn just in front of the burnt house.

After what seemed like an eternity the other Firefighter came out carrying nothing. People still craned their necks, hoping that someone might emerge after him and “*dololo.*” Nobody materialized. They diverted their unwarranted curiosity to the person lying on the lawn. “Who is it?” they wondered. “It might be the woman of the house.” “Perhaps it is her husband?” They stood there creating and recreating the story of what had happened. Some wished the father and

the son had been ravaged by the fire and only the woman of the house could be saved. As the saying goes, “be careful what you wish for?”

The police summoned the Forensics department to send a vehicle to fetch this human bundle. By this time people were so wishful of seeing who it was. They came instantaneously and brought out their tray. They took some photographs and then took the bundled up corpse and left. People now were left guessing who that might be. Some said it was the woman of the house; some thought it was her perpetually drunk husband; whereas to some it was their *nyaope* high son. People and their insatiable curiosity. One thing though that remained a mystery for a long while is that there were three tenants in that house but on that illustrious day, one body was found. What happened to the other two?

On the day of the funeral, friends; relatives; neighbours; congregants and the EPWP workers(*ono-orenji*) were there. They showed their unwavering support through song; eulogies and some even bought her wreaths with messages. They sang. They spoke on length about the woman of the house. Some declared her a long-sufferer; some liked her conviction for her house did not fall apart in her presence. Some envied her resilience for she would suffer in silence the beatings; the insults and even the abuse from her cruel husband. He would bring her drunken mistress and like the uncircumcised mongrel he is, he would copulate with her right in front of the woman of the house. Some were even asking what is it that she saw in this baboon. Strangely all these questions were asked in her absence. I guess it has become a norm now in the township, to speak courteously about the deceased lest you be jinxed for the remainder of your life.

People were busy speaking; sermonizing and sanctifying the woman of the house, others were wondering of the whereabouts of this lackey husband and his mischievous son. What had transpired on that tragic day? Days went by, followed by weeks then months turned to years. No sign of the suspicious two. They were now suspected of having killed the woman of the house and setting her and the house alight before vanishing into thin air. The incident was becoming a thing of the past, when the community learnt that these two were actually in prison. They were found wantonly wandering in town the same night. What made them look suspicious was the fact that they hid themselves whenever they heard a sound of a vehicle. Their clothes had bloodstains. The police hauled them in for questioning and they spoke of how they feared for their lives. They

took turns in raping the woman of the house after which they killed her. They then decided to set the house alight so it could seem as an accident. The entire charge-office was shocked by such diabolical dysfunctionality.

## Hope Dwindling

You see this is like I am reminiscent of days long past. I usually saw her when she was going to school, our paths would cross at the Old Cemetery just above Fikizolo Primary. This is because we crossed there. It was a short-cut. Each time when we met she would just greet courteously and pass, meanwhile I would be reveling at her voice and relishing it in my head. There was something with the distinctness of her voice that was alluring. I liked these chance encounters, for they afforded me an opportunity to see her closely. I also relished the sight of her, in fact this was what made me get up out of bed every morning at weekdays. I always knew I was going to see her. The sight of her awakened some desire in me. She had this full but curvaceous body that made my head to spin. Even in class I would daydream about her. That's it. I was infatuated.

One morning I decided to summon my courage and tell her how I felt. I woke up, prepared myself as usual for my routine walk to school. I felt so emboldened, by what? I still do not know. Suffice it to say that I was emboldened, right? So to school I went, softly whistling Luther Vandross' *Endless Love*. I was whistling it because when it comes to singing I am an actual murderer. I would kill the tune and destroy the rhythm. So I went through my pick-up lines and sharpened my jokes, just to have her at ease. We met at the usual spot and she curtsied and tried to walk past. But I asked if she would mind just giving me a second of her time. Even then I could smell her fragrance, it was a *Shower to Shower* deodorant. So distinct was the smell that I can remember. It was *Musk* fragrant. I asked if she would not mind going out with me sometime during the weekend. "That depends" was her answer. "On what now?" I asked. "Where you intend on taking me to." "Wherever you want to go, just say it and I will do it." "You know what, I would love to visit the Recreation Centre. It's just that I am afraid of going there alone". "Recreation Centre it is then, on Saturday". "Okay. See you then." "Good-bye." I said surprised at the ease of our chat. I did not have to use all those cheesy pick-up lines nor the jokes which I found doleful and dull. Cutting to the chase, Saturday came. I put on my best apparel which was my Levi's jeans, a pair of Adidas sneakers and my trademark Black and White Orlando Pirates shirt. I went to wait for her at Chan Henry's in Raglan Road. She came strutting down "E" Street, looking suave on her short checked skirt and white Tennis shirt and some Puma sneakers. I felt like I was floating in the air. "Wow, you look so astonishing" I said. "Hi and thank you,

you look amazing yourself". So we took a taxi to Albany Road where the Rec Centre was. On this Saturday there was a "Members' Day". Nonetheless non-members were welcome. Being non-members the both of us we watched as the dance went on. We sat and chatted about possibilities of us hitting off, where we want to be in the future what we like and dislike. To our surprise time flew and it was time we went home. So we went to the taxi rank in Queen Street, on our way we were holding hands like lovers do. I was smitten and Lord! I didn't want this to end. We boarded the taxi and went home, before we parted we made a vow to meet next Saturday. For the whole week I was thinking about her. I even lost concentration at school. I saw her every day on the usual spot we greeted, smiled and waved madly. So Saturday came and again I went to wait for her at the same spot. She did not come. I waited. She sent one of the girls from her street to tell me she could not make it. I was devastated. "How could she disappoint me like this?" "Does she know how much I invested in this our affair?" I went home and headed straight to my room where I wept. "Was she trying to jilt me?" "Why did she not tell me during the week?" Monday came and I felt I needed to ask her. We met at the same spot and she greeted me but not with same attitude. I asked her what was wrong. "My parents do not approve of our affair, they claim that you are way older than me." She proffered by way of explaining.

"What has my age got to do with how we feel about each other?" I interjected trying hard to guilt trip her.

"Look *Boetie* what my parents say I obey, so please try and understand," she said and those were her last words.

My life was in tatters, I watched the shreds scattering before me. It took me days just to regain my appetite. I was fast waning, but I went on with my bruised ego for months on end. What was eating me was that I saw her on the same spot. So I decided to change path. That was not helpful for as they say abstinence begets longing, for as much as I kept my distance I also longed to see her. It's been a while now since we last saw each other but I still wish to bump into her even if it's by accident.

## The Clown

The Carnival is a multi-faceted event. Organized annually it is a fundraiser, an entertainment, unifier and awareness raiser. But then the clown. Where had she seen him before. He wore some oversized shoes, khaki pants with suspenders and an orange and white striped jersey. There loomed an ugly mirth about him. Perhaps it's because of his favorite epithet: "*Like the Shadow of your smile.*" That would be followed by sadistic laughter, the one that scares the shit out of you. The clown hovered about like an apostrophe. She knew in her heart of hearts that it was for a good cause. Perhaps a home to the vagrants and the intimidating beggars, not forgetting the street kids. Abandonment. How can one abandon their own flesh and blood? Shouldn't it be a punishable offence? People ought not walk out on their responsibilities. Sinful creatures, people are. The abandonment. Think family planning, dream contraceptives, meditate injections, hallucinate about the loop and always worship abstinence if you won't choose the condom as your partner. Then there won't be exponential problems, even population density. No more casual leg openings, no goings in and out. Just staying put. The assortment of garments and regalia adorned on this day are representative of "the rainbow nation." The clown. There is something peculiar about him. She could not pinpoint it exactly. He was not that important. Impotence. It should be an option. People be neutered, or maybe made to suffer erectile dysfunction, the eating and breeding lot. They bring a lot of these ugly babies. This is not natural. Strange ways of those who suffer the yoke. They kill time by having unprotected sex. Sinful creatures, people are. You suffer under the yoke of starvation, yet you bring so many bawling, malnourished infants. You should be neutered. Strange place, *Makhandla* this. If it were in *Nyanga*, the Premier would have legislated neutering. Just like *Porta potters*. Imagine such audacity, people walking around carrying their excreta. Strange place, *Nyanga* this. In *Makhandla* there is no public display of your apparatus, no matter how big or small it is. No skulking around like a horny orangutan. "*Excuse me, excuse me Security, what town is this again?*" "*Why am I naked?*" "*Mental...what?*" Senility. Insanity am I going berserk? Am I ageing? Amazing how time flies. The neglected, they become hardened criminals. Heartless bastards. Masters of evasion. They steal right in front of uniformed policemen and security personnel.

Perhaps the uniformed are uninformed. The carnival proceeded. Urged forward by drums and trumpets. The clown again. He is the dentist. Now she can vividly recall. His sparkling white teeth are a constant reminder. It's been so obvious she could not pick it up. His long immaculate fingers. He has white gloves on, at least on one hand. He creates balloon animals and give them to kids. He does all this with a smile: "The Shadow of your smile." The strange thing about this place is that it has no distinguishing landscape. It feels like Makhandla and yet it looks like Nyanga. "Damn it! I am going insane. Now I remember the image, the blood-stained clothes in my closet and the screwdriver with which I killed him. I stabbed him a few times on the chest, he had hit me the day before. Slapped me across the face. What could I have done. You see, I was getting tired of being his punching bag. So I summoned all the courage I could get, then I stabbed him."

The fire blazed in a second, she had fueled it with diesel. Cause she wanted it done and over with. She went to wash her hands on the sink at the bathroom and that's when she heard the siren and a knock on the door.

## Hope is Another Cuntry

Hope is sweatin' in the sweltherin' heat, but she aint swervin'. She's done stuck her foot in the mud. Crazy beast she is, this our Hope specially when thirstin'. We was ridin' 'er, me and mine friends. But we noticed that the damn beast is thirstin' for water, so we brought 'er here at the pond to drink some. We let 'er to drink and went a-hunting for small game. The pond is nearly dried. There is some croakin' though, mebbe from them frogs. So we left 'er to drink some. Them birds soared up high in the sky and there was none of this game shit big or small, mebbe is the blazin' sun. "Come-on folks let's go sit our arses in the shade now, or they'll be ashen scorched." Mine friends didn't give a tinkers cuss about the sun, all they wanted was somethin' to roast. We go on for awhile me and mine friends, till we wake us some snake. Sneaky and scary bastard. I cringe and try to get as far away as possible. In a frenzy mine friends go on attack mode. They done pelt it with stones till one could recognize neither head nor tail.

"Why did you run?"

"Let this crazy fool be. He's all actin' like a weirdo now. Look how he shakes. Why you never seen a snake afore?"

They asked me these dumb and silly questions. All the while my mind was thinkin bout Hope. Mebbe she's done drinking now.

"Guys I've gotta go and check on Hope. You don't mind that do you?"

I don't wait for an answer, I run on the thorny footpath till I reach the pond. Fore I even reach it I can see Hope was wagging her tail. She's lookin' this away and that away as if something was botherin' er.

"Wa's up girl? Why you ackin' so crazy?"

She neighs and lets out a fart. Soon as that happens, I know somethin' s gone wrong. I go near her and she tries to turn, but her front hooves are stuck in the mucky mud. I plunge on the dirt to try and remove her. I try this hoof and that hoof. Nothin'. I huff and I puff. Still nothin'. This is hopeless. "What are we s'posed to do to get you outta here?" Frogs offer a croakin' answer, and I ignore them cause I aint fluent at croakin'. The hadedas, they startle me as they hagedash in flight. Mine friends are nowhere in sight.

“Help! Guys come help me, Hope has done stuck her hooves on mud!”

Silence. Now I aint thinkin’. I run. I run homewards.

My lungs are burnin’ as I gasp for air. My chest is in pains.

I run. I run like a crazy goon. The balls of my feet are sore.

I feel my cheeks shakin’ as I run. I feel tears running across my shameful face towards my ears, as I think about Granny and what she’s gonna say.

“Didn’t I tell you boys to leave that poor beast alone.”

“Why did you take ‘er there, in the first instance?”

“But Granny the pony was thirstin’.”

“And so? Did you have to ride that poor beast from here till death knowingly she was thirstin’?”

Silence.

“Boy I asked you a question?”

“No Granny, you see...”

“No, I don’t see nothin’. Come-on now go and call y’er uncle and tell’ im to bring a rope. Y’all got to yank that poor thing outta that murk you’ve done sunk her in.”

Again I run. I run to my uncle’s. I am still worried about Hope, surely there ought to be a way of helpin’ er. I run and am oblivious of the dogs barkin’. I run past the school buildings and the desk frames gawkin’ helplessly at me. I run past the ruins of Mahoney’s father’s house and I think I heard some squeals and moans and I ignore them. I got some bigger shit to think ‘bout than watchin’ ‘em screwin’. I run till I reach my uncle’s gate. There’s two women standin’ at the gate and Aunty is the third ‘un. The two women, one is in a shawl and the other has some glasses on, they spoke in hushed tones. Mebbe they y’all be gossipin’ bout someone, but I don’t care none. I heave and heave ev’n afore I says anythin’ for I’ve been runnin’ hard and long. They look at me like I was some alien or some curiosity of spitefulness.

“Aunty, I am here lookin’ for my uncle. Granny says he must come quickly and not forget to bring a rope.”

“Didn’t your mama teach some respect. That you greet your elders when you see ‘em?” one of the women yelled.

“Sorry Ma’am, my bad, my bad really. But I’ve got to get uncle. Is he home?”

“You! woman, teach this here child some respect. Rude and disrespec’ful basterd.”

I really dunno old folks, if they wants to pick a fight, why do they always pick on us kids? Why not on someone their size and age? I hope that they were not gossips cause Lawd have mercy on ‘em if they were. The way I knows my uncle, hell ‘d just be a barbecue shop. My uncle comes out of the house hurriedly, I dunno whether he heard the sound of my voice or he was goin’ somewhere.

“Damn! If it aint my favorite nephew. Wa’s up neph...Com’ on now let’s git inside. Come, come.”

He patted my back and I entered. The two women tiptoed and shuffled away soon as uncle appeared outta the house. Leaving aunty alone there. And she also scuttled past uncle into the house. Afore my uncle asks, I shot, tellin’ him the whole story and why I was there. Usually my uncle would be excited if he was summoned for with the rope, for he knew that meant free meat for him. Cause sure as hell there was gonna be some slaughterin’. But not today, today twas to help a sunken Hope.

“Okay neph, go tell her that I’ll be there in a flash.”

Again, in most cases we’d go together. But not today, today Hope’s sunken. I scutter out of my uncle’s and soon as I hit the street, I run. I cannot afford to procrastinate, so I take to my heels. It’s a bit dark. But I run anyways. The dogs have a passionate dislike to anything speeding, so they start pursuing me. I stop and curse at them. That angers them ev’n more, and now they threaten to maul me. I stop to pick some rocks up and start firin’ missiles at the offending felines. At this point they too are irked by my retaliation and the y come fiercely at me. Shit! What am I gonna do now?

Suddenly I hear a resounding *voop!* and *thump!* The damned creatures whine and run. I gaze over my shoulder and there’s uncle lashin’ at them dogs with a stick. I throw ev’n fiercer than afore. After a long while we win the battle but not the war. We start homewards. We chart about

this and that, then silence. Soon we arrive and Granny is fumin' with rage. She tells me to make a cup of coffee for my uncle. Uncle courteously declines the hot beverage and I am excited. I wait outside as they talk 'bout Hope. The waitin' gets to me and I start walkin' toward the pond my mind pacin'. I did not ev'n notice my uncle walkin' beside until he spoke. I was a bit alarmed.

"Don't you worry none neph, we are gonna get her fine."

"Thanks uncle, I am worried 'bout Granny tho'. She is in a fit."

"You done gotten 'er to that state. You should be worried 'bout 'er, I hate to say you're doin' a fine job of killin 'er."

Silence.

I am consumed by my own guilt now and the air become languorous. My uncle is quite a gullible person; I soon discern his thoughts from the salient smugness of his face. I become nauseas. We soon find hope lying on 'er belly and mine friends' waist deep in mud. I was ecstatic, for I thought they'd done deserted me. My uncle threw them the rope and told them to tie around Hope's waist. She stood up as soon as she saw me approachin'. The rope was fastened around 'er, my uncle said we should pull 'er from one side and it was easier. She fell on the side and we pulled 'er as hard as we could. She was quick to rise as soon as we had gotten 'er outta the water. Everyone now was dirty with the murky stinkin' mud. My uncle used the rope to reign Hope and she took 'er with, they left us there still puzzled about the state of our outfits.

"We was done filthy without Hope."

### **The Oscillating Silence – A story.**

*This story is based on an article titled: “Killers at close quarters”, by Melinda Ferguson. (True Love: November 2005) Pages 104 – 108.*

“A woman’s lifeless corpse was discovered in the drain at the Railway Station. This bruised and battered body is believed to be of a local girl, whose name is withheld until her next of kin are alerted.”

There was a contingency of police officers at the Railway Station, some with Alsatians dogs on leashes, some on horseback and most were on foot searching the area for some clues. The whole area was cordoned-off with the polices’ “danger-tape” to prevent any unwarranted intrusion from passersby. Photos were taken, whilst bystanders were speaking in hushed tones. The woman in blue jeans, a yellow “T-shirt” with a smiling Mandela face though bloodstained was lying there limp and lifeless. She had scars on her neck, perhaps due to strangulation. More photos taken. It is believed that the body was discovered by two Security guards who were en route to work. They immediately alerted the police, who together with the Forensics rushed to the scene in no time.

The 2 security personnel were taken to the Beaufort Street Police station for mandatory and regulatory questioning and thereafter were released to go to work until further notice. They were not to leave town pending the investigation. Meanwhile one person from the onlookers identified the body and offered assistance to the police in locating her family and relatives. It is believed that the woman was from Transit Camp, so her relatives were soon notified of the incident and were even brought to the scene. After what seemed like an eternity the body was put in a body bag and loaded on the Forensics’ vehicle. Her mother was hysterical as she watched all these proceedings. In fact the whole family was disoriented. They were taken by another police vehicle to a nearby clinic for counselling. They were distraught.

Rumour has it that Boniswa was with her boyfriend Thabo the night preceding the incident. They were spotted drinking at Cathcart Arms pub, after which they left hand in hand as lovers do. Now her boyfriend of many years Thabo, was a shy, well-mannered, soft-spoken lively person of good personage. He loved sport especially soccer. He was vociferous when it came to issues of gender equality and politics in general. Everybody in Joza knew him as a fashionable trendsetter

whose only flaw was a roving eye/ a womanizer of sorts. News in the township have a tendency of spreading like prairie fire, so did the news of Thabo's hauling in for questioning and allegedly killing his girlfriend.

The whole township was in shock. The eerie gloom that covered the township was somewhat nauseating. When the township was still trying to get its curious head around the issue of Thabo's arrest for allegedly killing his girlfriend, the tabloids were having a swell day. They were busy with their sensationalism nonsense.

"Man denied bail after killing girlfriend," what recklessness and what temerity?

So many questions and yet no answers.

## **The Encounter**

Before we parted our ways, he undid the zippers of my sweater and ran his hands on my hairy chest. That made me feel ill at ease. He was clueless about my discomfort. He was clueless about his being in the closet. I simply did my zippers. “Things are not supposed to be like this, you know. Between you and me that is. I am as straight as a straightjacket.” That did not go well with him. He became infuriated. Silence. The long pause made me uneasy. I decided there and then to hit the road without even saying good- bye. This time it was for good. As I was leaving, I remembered a song by Ray Charles that went like “Hit the road Jack.”

I bit my lip and cursed silently. “Fucking queer, deranged non-binary.” I was clueless about my homophobic attitude. I walk faster homewards. They say no way fails to go home. “Lord please bear with me; I do not like to be stroke on my chest by another man.” It is a Sabbath. The way home crosses an open field, and goes past the Old Cemetery then across Dr Jacob Zuma Drive and voila you are there. On my way past the barren field I encountered some cows grazing. Some were even lying on their bellies chewing on their cud. I startled some hadeda ibises and they responded in their usual manner making a noise. I was in turn alarmed by the wretched creatures. My heart pounded. Darkness. “God, am I going blind? Who knows with my anxiety and depression. As soon as I arrive home, I am welcomed by the smell of vetkoeks. Grandma is baking. I suppress the urge to hug her. I simply greet at her head straight to my room.

I am feeling a bit nauseous. I lie on my bed and think. “Why do we have people like him? Am I being homophobic and unreasonable. am I in denial?” This plethora of unanswerable questions was beginning to numb me. They threaten to suffocate me. I drown in this cesspit of anger and confusion. This useless misery. I was at the tier on the dock of insanity. My ship not firmly anchored. The water was splashing on its sides. Am I going berserk. A dog howls. I have never in my life gotten down with a queer person. Childish naiveté. It is like a nightmare. I gaze out my window, in time to stare directly at the eyes of an owl gawking at me. I am petrified. “It’s an ill-omen. Perhaps it’s hungry”. I reassured myself.

“Hamba, Voetsek!” I shouted at the owl by way of chasing it. And it took to flight immediately. I was left pondering the idea of an owl at that time of the day. “Where is the bird sanctuary”. I wondered aloud to no-one in particular. I have a lot on my plate right now to be worried about owls. He once told me that he wanted to die a happy man, am I a ticket to his happy ending? Am

I a means to an end, really? Well I am not setting my foot again there, ever! What if next time he attempts sodomy? He is a bit unhinged and intimidating. He skulks about like a hyena and he also has this sinister laugh. I hate that with him. Rumor has it that he is also bestial. One day he was caught at it with a dog. They gave him a nasty beating and wound-up in Settlers Hospital. Blasphemous earth. Polluting souls and corrupting spirits. Confusing minds and consuming beings. now you want to wrap me in your coitus. Coil around my essence...

A few days later, I heard through the grape-vine that he was discharged from Settlers hospital. I had the urge to go and see him. It is him I have my unresolved issues with. He is a good person though. Just a confused soul who doesn't know his sexual identity. I bumped on him one certain Tuesday at the Assumption Development Centre. He told me that he was attending the poetry sessions there. His poetry was very abstract to the sense of being deep. The situation was becoming awkward for I wanted to avoid him. And yet he kept on appearing where I least expected him. Later on they formed a group called The Fax Machines and they held their ciphers every fortnight at Foley's ground. That was the last I heard of him.

## **Tsetse-Fly and the Cow**

Once upon a time, on a scorching day. The cows were grazing as usual on the superbly green veld. There was this bull, who decided to lie and ruminate under a tree. *“How I long for the cool waters of the kloof.”* Thought he. *“Because now the sun is unbearable.”* He surmised, chewing upon the cud of his thoughts. Suddenly. “Bzzzt! Bzzzt! Bzzzt!” so buzzed a bored Tsetse-fly.

So he finds it befitting that he on the bull’s horn should land. And thus did he. He neither as greeted the bull nor announced his unprecedented landing. So bored was he that as soon he landed, he started flexing his muscles. From abs; chest; thigh and calf. In self-imposed importance, he thought himself as superbly structured. He was sweating profusely and on the verge of tiring.

He thought he might as well ask his unconcerned host. So flew he closer to the bull’s earshot. *“Tell me my bull friend, what do you think of my physique?”*. *“Nothing, absolutely nothing at all. In fact I neither noticed nor felt your presence till you spoke.”* Now Tsetse fly was a miserable miser. He was irked to the ire of his being. He took to the wings as he did arrive.

With neither thanks nor bye and byes. So confused now was mister bull, of such green behavior as shown by miser Tsetse fly. *“We always seem very important to ourselves,”* thought he.

And back to his bovine and ruminating thoughts went he. The cows grazed as usual on the superbly green veld. To them it was grazing as usual.

## **Falcon Rising – a Movie**

This is a movie I chose to write about after reading Janice Lee's *Damnation*. "*All stories are about disintegration.*"

**Be`la Tarr**

### **Insert #1**

There are 3 tots/ shot-glasses on the coffee-table, each small tot contains a bullet. He lifts up a *Jack Daniel's* whisky bottle, half empty and starts filling the glasses one by one. Before he even starts drinking he points at each glass/ tot and starts counting calling out names:

"Harry Adams."

"Scott Fager."

"Charles Milton."

"John Keanes."

"Abram Hudson."

### ***Afterwards:***

- Some snippets of a black-and-white movie, supposedly his reminiscence about a certain war start showing. This seems ritualistic though, as some flash-backs are of him in Military fatigues carrying a riffle and on his waist a water container is strapped on his belt also with some spare magazines, full. He also has some bullet-proof vest on.

### **Insert #2**

There are bodies everywhere, some lie sprawled on the tarmac some are distorted by the impetus of bombs. There are snipers tip-toeing around what seems like Army Barracks/ perhaps a makeshift base for the alleged Rebel Army. The sniper seem to shoot at any and everything in sight. Bodies are picked up and loaded on a large Army Truck. Some have gun wounds some multiple gunshot wounds on the chest, the body and even the head. This is American propaganda.

### **Insert #3**

Back to him, in color. He gulps the whisky from the shots one by one. Again the scenes start replaying. He stands up, walks out of the lounge and into the Gym. Here he starts working out, slowly at first and the routine seems rigorous after a while. He begins with some muscle stretching exercises, some sit-ups, push-ups and he even lifts some weights. He proceeds to the punching bag and starts delivering some hard blows and swift kicks and thereafter to the treadmill where he jogs, then sprints then runs until he is panting and sweating. Then he goes out of the Gym.

*Lights Out.*

### **Insert #4**

*Lights Back On*

He is lying on his back on top of a sleeper-couch, on the coffee-table an empty *Jack Daniel's* bottle. He wakes up, gets out and is on the street of an upmarket suburb. The street seems busy with people going on their daily businesses. He enters a Food and Beverage convenience store and greets the teller {male Caucasian}. He darts straight to the Liquor aisle and now he is busy choosing between taking a full bottle or some ciders...

### **...Meanwhile**

In bustles 2 Thugs, one is carrying a shotgun/pump-gun and the other is carrying a knife not just any knife a bayonet. They demand that "Everybody down!" He is oblivious to their shouts and yells. He is busy weighing his options. One of the thugs approaches the teller and demands money, whilst the one with a gun goes to him and tells him to lie down. The teller hands some notes to the thug and the thug demands that he opens the till-machine and he thus obliges. The other thug nudges him between the shoulder blades with the nozzle of his gun and says between clenched teeth: "I said everybody down." He turns and faces the thug, he holds the nozzle towards his stomach and start speaking slowly.

"If you shoot me at the stomach, my guts will spill all over this place and that will be messy."

"But if you shoot me right through the chest, you might hit the vitals. Who knows, might miss my heart."

“And if you shot me through the mouth, my brains will splatter all around this aisle. Now Ooh! My favorite right through the head.” *{Pointing the gun to his head}*. “Shoot me! I said Shoot me.”

The thug is shaking his head in disbelief and is quite amazed by such eagerness to die. He says: “You’re crazier than I thought.”

He says: “No, Just impatient, now shoot me and don’t make me do it.”

“Shoot him”, says the thug to the other. He grabs the gun from the thug and hits him on the face with the its butt. The other thug makes as if to attack him and he points the gun to his groin, whilst he is looking where the gun is pointing he hits him on the chin with the butt also. He points the shotgun at the thugs and signals to them by the head that they should beat it. They look at each other and simultaneously run towards the door and exit. He takes a Jack Daniels bottle and pays the bartender and leaves...

*(Lights Out)*

## The Caritas

He wore some oversized shoes a striped jersey and khaki pants with suspenders. He had an ugly mirth about him. Perhaps he laughs at his own jokes. The clown monkeying about. “The shadow of your smile”. He knew it was for a good cause. Perhaps a home to the street-kids, who lie on the street. Abandonment. Should not it be a punishable offence? People ought not walkout on their kids. Sinful creatures, people are. The abandonment. Think contraceptives, meditate injections, hallucinate the loop, dream about condoms and worship abstinence. Then there won’t be population density. No more leg opening and no going in and out. Just staying put. The assortment of garments and regalia adorned on this day are a representation of “the rainbow nation”. The clown.

There is something peculiar about him. Cannot pinpoint it yet. He was not that important. Impotence. Yes, they should be impotent. Suffer erectile dysfunction, the breeding lot. This is not natural. Strange ways of those who suffer the yoke. Sinful. You suffer starvation, yet you bring so many bawling, malnourished infants. You should be neutered. Strange place, Jo’burg this. For if it were in Cape Town, the Premier would legalize and legislate neutering. Just like she did with “Porta potters”, such audacity. People walking around carrying their excreta. Strange place, Cape Town this. For if it were Jo’burg no skunking around like a horny orangutan. No public displaying of your apparatus, no matter how big or small. *Excuse me! Excuse me! Security sir, what town is this again? Why am I naked?* It’s this nakedness and nudity that exasperates me. Insanity. Senility. Am I that old and aged. God it is amazing how time flies. The abandoned. They harden and become masters of evasion. They steal right in front of uniformed policemen.

Perhaps the uniformed are uninformed. The procession marched on. Urged forward by drums and cymbals. The clown again. He is the dentist. Now I can vividly recall. His white teeth serve as a constant reminder. It’s been so obvious I could not pick it up. His long immaculate fingers. He has white gloves on. At least on one hand. He creates animals out of balloons and give them to the kids. All that he does with a smile. The strange thing about this place is it does not have its own distinguishable landscape. It feels like you are in Jo’burg and it looks exactly like Cape Town. Damn it! I must be going insane.

Now I remember, the image and also the bloodstained clothes. I have to burn them. He thought unto himself. The fire blazed in a second, he had fueled it with petrol. Cause he wanted it over and

done with. He went to wash, put on some fresh clothes and as usual he went to his favorite coffee spot. With a cup of coffee in hand he sighed in relief. *Ah! Now this is Jozi my Jo'burg.* The Braamfontein center with the hum-dum of book lovers going in and out.

## Irksome Thoughts

Each time I think about that irksome and spiteful day my head balloons to bursting point with thoughts/as my heart suffers incessant seizures/it's like I have a bee in my bonnet/it's only that I am blowing hot and cold/my eyes are fogged with guilt and I slide my head in between my cupped hands/the same hands that were meant to caress, protect, massage, fend for and hold dearly are now caked with blood/what good is a man who uses his God-given strength to terrify women?/and the one he claims to love *nogal*/but cowers like a dog when confronted by men like him/prurient thoughts invade the corridors of my memory/I am emboldened by a feeble jubilation that at least I am not in front of her/that's the fervent lie I 've been telling myself since the incident/thoughts of that day threaten to jump out of my cranium as I frown in idiosyncrasy/concealing my white guilt and shame as white as a wild white cat in a fire ravaged prairie/now my thoughts march on like soldiers to battle/they thud their boots on the walls of my skull/I was of the notion that today we would be walking hand-in-hand down the aisle/I take a cursive glance at the vase and again a stream of happy thoughts invade my now morose mind/they jump with joy as I think of our first embarrassing kiss, our first tryst as teens/Ah! Our first night out partying like there was no other day/I am awakened by resentful thoughts *toyitoying* down my spine and crossing through my ribcage to convoke again on my chest/Am I really such a wet blanket/Last year I tried to reach out to her begging for a truce at least/I told her how I exorcised my demons/How I wrote about and cried and aggrieved over what had happened and how I burnt all that as a single offering to the gods of mercy and compassion/Yet all that returns just to hoard me with haunting images/Am I a beast to all of womanhood/This leaves me with a taste of bile in my throat and it threatens to suffocate me/My ears become blunt and my eyes weaken/Dimly I see my capsized boat far and out of reach/I feel like a leper, a castaway/Damn! Do I still see myself as a human/the seizures return and my heart beats fast/I feel a sudden rush of blood about to sprout out my nostrils/I try to scream, as I open my mouth only words spew out /they are dressed in army fatigues and they parachute and float in front of my teary eyes/I wipe the tears and try to watch as the words dance tentatively/like inebriated souls, they dance out of tune/like a horde of people not sure whether to leave or to stay/This exacerbates an already perilous predicament/The firmament blazes forth the scars I otherwise would have loved to forget/Her corrosive smile drills a hole in my conscience/She asks a sharp edged question, that cuts through my skin/Blood gushes from the cuts and I fear I might bleed to

death/Sorrow swims in my blood doing a back-stroke/I close my eyes trying to erase all visions of her/I start punching and clawing randomly and that yields nothing/I scream for help, my voice escapes me and sits there in front of the speakers/My voice now comes and whisper in my ears saying: "*Do you remember the time...*" Guilt comes holding a tray with a closed dish/I crumble and start weeping/ "At least you won't be alone. We'll keep you company." That's what they said to me, Guilt and My voice/Am I so gullible/Look at the vultures hovering arrogantly above my guilty conscience/No grain of hope is discernible from the not so distant past and the looming future/I feel like a rolling stone/The one they say gathers no moss/The hyacinth of my deeds binds me and is about to drown me on the flood of her tears/As I clutch on the crooked roots of every straight tree I encounter/I can hear voices saying "*The road to hell is paved with good intentions.*"

## **The Forest of Silent Whispers**

It is a morning of anxieties, the one that makes you want to stay indoors and forbid yourself seeing the outside world and all of its gloom. The weather is wild and unconstitutional, as if it is spewed by the cauldrons of hell...

...The elders sat in a semi-circle in what appeared to be a kraal. There lingered a bovine smell, redolent of cow-dung. One of the elders busied himself by filling his pipe with tobacco. Too preoccupied by this action that he became oblivious of the orator. And from my unsolicited observations they were all dressed in blankets of dissimilar animal skins. Perhaps the disparate totems of their respective accords. There was the spotted leopard, the golden-maned lion, the black and white zebra and the patterned brownish skin of the giraffe spread on the floor. There were other assortments of indistinct animal skins, perhaps the less significant of the pact. My intrigue fell on the throne, which was made of an elephant skin. Upon noticing me, the orator began by clearing some spittle from his throat:

*“I can see that we have a visitor from the world of the undead. Perhaps he is heralding news for us, but I wish for him to know that we do not take kindly to outsiders. For what happens here is sacrosanct, therefore it cannot be relayed to the undead. Are we clear?”*

I remember nodding vehemently.

*“Since you are not of this world, you will have to undergo the cleansing and initiation ceremony. Your guide and host will show you the ropes. Now if you will excuse us, these matters are delicate and sensitive.” “As I was saying to you great Silent – whisperers our unanimous voice should be made luculent; our breeding grounds can never be their hunting grounds. Not while I’m still alive...”*

I did not understand what the orator was referring to, nor did I make it my business to think about it. My host and guide signaled for me to follow him and I did that obediently. I followed him closely for fear of getting lost in this strange and secluded land. I suppose he sensed my fear, for he told me that we were going to the river. All places here are endowed with peculiar names. The river whereupon I was to do my cleansing was called *“The River of Partings.”*

*“Whereabouts is that? If you don’t mind me asking.”*

*“Don’t worry, I’ll take you there.”*

We started on a footpath and down a beaten path on the shrub. There was an aromatic smell of rotten leaves and moist soil. The trees with their funny branches, that grew upwards and bore yellowish green leaves. We passed a field with people tilling it. They were in pairs of threes and where there were two and one happened to be passing by, he left whatever he was doing to lend a helping hand. I was still trying to get my head around this unusual geographical arithmetic when accidentally I bumped into my guide and host.

*“I can see that you are surprised by our ways, come-on now you will get used to them.”*

At this moment I was suppressing the urge to ask where we were. We walked up a slope and past some pockmarked buildings.

*“This was your grandpa’s homestead, before his ascension, and this was the hearth where we used to sit around the fire.*

*We used to enjoy your grandma’s home baked bread...”*

...There were kids playing innocently around a brimful wooden barrel of water. The weather was warm so what they did is that one person would guard the barrel, while others will try to get some water out of it. This should be done without him noticing, so others will be decoys. Should he find out he will pursue those who try to extricate water from the conduit. The first one to be caught, now it would be his turn to guard the barrel. The game would go on until the old woman summons the kids for their midday meal. Here everyone was related. It is nothing like the impudence of the land of the Wilderness. The children played, ate, worked and even erred together. Here a parent bore a child for another parent and raising children is a communal thing. The children left their beautiful game and went into the house. Silence...

*“We have arrived at the river. Now all you’ve got to do is to strip naked and I will smear this powdery medicine all over your body. Then you will wash it downstream. It is itchy, please try not to scratch.”*

I did as I was told, not so much as a question asked. I stripped naked smeared the powdery medicine and went downstream to wash. All this time I suppressed the impulse to scratch. My guide and host possessed a lithe and agile character. He exuded with the sublime confidence of

youth. He also took off his clothes and splashed on the water beside me, after a while he told me that we are all set to go now. I asked him about our second destination and why it was called the *“Forest of Silent Whispers.”* He related to me how he grew up hearing stories about the forest, and how it was aptly named as such. For once you are there you dare not speak loudly, you only whisper intuitively because of fear. We were going there for my initiation. On the way we happened upon a troop of monkeys, who made it a point that they climb to the highest branches possible in evasion.

*“Why is everything about this place always fear inducing.”*

*“No, my friend it’s nothing like that, you see here we hold everything in high esteem. Even the wild animals.”*

On entering the forest, we encountered various animals, ranging from wildebeest, some springbuck, warthogs and a number of giraffes. I was puzzled by their dismissiveness, their carefree nature. Usually when animals encounter a human being they either charge towards him or take to galloping wildly in flight. No, not these animals they gazed at us disinterestedly and continued with their usual daily routine of survival. I was all over the place because of excitement, when my guide and host cautioned me to be as silent as I possibly can.

*“Why are you shushing me now?”*

Involuntarily the question leaped out of my mouth. He simply gave me a disconcerting gawk. We continued a bit and arrived at the place for my initiation. The barren space provided enough room for us to make fire. We gathered enough woods to last us until the early morning and we sat by the fire talking in hushed tones. My guide and host did not unpack to me the purpose of our visit to the forest. During our conversation at the fireside, he mentioned the “beast of the forest.”

*“We might not even encounter him now, especially if he absolves you of any animal-cruelty.”*

*“What if he doesn’t?”*

*“Then I will have to use this.”*

He showed me a curved horn with holes on both sides.

*“I will blow on this horn and the elders will come with dehorned ram.”*

*“But I thought you said...”*

*“Never question our ways, and besides you will need an obeisance. This my friend is my Horn of Chronicles.”*

*“What is a Chr...?”*

*“Shhh! Listen to the sound of the wind...”*

To me there was nothing peculiar with the sound of the wind, though it was blowing and increasingly becoming chilly. I looked at my guide and host with inquisitive eyes. He continued with whatever he was doing utterly oblivious of my curiosity. We searched the sky for that bright star that would lead me to the animal deemed as my totem. Here; all your senses have to be alert, for you don't know how your signal will reveal itself. It can either be through sound, a certain smell or even a happening. As I was busy trying to discern any sign from the firmament to my immediate environs, I heard a rustling sound. It was like something was galumphing through the grass. I tried to wake my guide and host and to my surprise he had vanished, this sudden realization galvanized me into action. I randomly picked up a stick among the wood we had gathered for starting the fire. Slowly I tiptoed towards the grass and as I was slowly approaching it, I immediately recognized the ruffled mane and the scowl with big yellowish teeth showing. I was startled at first, then I had to act and to act very fast, I reversed my steps now moving towards the fire. The animal was crouching slowly preparing to pounce at me. I felt the heat from the fire and I realized that I could not take any further step. I heard the cackling laughter and before I could take action the animal leapt at me with a ferocious speed and menacing strength. So I just swung the stick in a single, vicious stroke and landed a lucky blow across its face. I hit it so hard that I felt the shock through my hand and pulsing all over my arm. The blow altered its intended direction towards me and right beside the fire it landed, whining. It tried hurdling to its feet and I could see that it was still in shock from the blow I had dealt. I followed with another blow to the head and it sprawled right where it stood. I had to make sure it was dead, so I hit it with the stick multiple times until someone snatched the stick from behind me. When I turned to see, it was my guide and host. *“I have been trying to stop you for far too long now! Do you want to beat this animal to an unidentifiable pulp?”*

*“No, it’s only that I wanted to be sure it is dead, this thing tried to attack me!”*

*“You do realize that this is going to be our supper tonight, don’t you?”*

A squeaky sound escaped my mouth. I was not used to consuming the flesh of wild animals. We skinned the animal using makeshift wooden knives and braaied the meat over the fire. The aroma of roasted meat was enough encouragement for me to dig-in. I noted that my guide and host was carrying a small pouch which had a variant of necessities of which salt was one of them. So to add flavor to the meat we added a bit of salt and we ate it. Desperation would make one consume things, one would otherwise not have. We took turns in holding the animal skin against the fire to dry, after which my guide and host designed a bag. He used the skin on the tail as a strap with which I would sling it on my shoulder. It was a beautiful bag indeed. He had fingers, my guide and host. Early in the hours of the morning we woke to the sound of birds chirping and singing in the morning. We hurriedly went to the river to bathe so that we can start our journey towards the village. Where now the elders were waiting, eager to accept me and embrace me as one of their own. Soon as we arrived at the village homestead, a bull was slaughtered. The village mothers brought some gift for the both of us. I was given a blanket resembling the fur of an antelope. The elders took turns in trying to advise us, warn us about their way of life. They spoke at length about manhood and what it means to the other world. Finally; a traditional fermented brew was brought and everybody was to drink and be merry. They were celebrating my arrival to the other world. After feasting and drinking I was tired and I asked my host and guide to take me to my room. He complied, then off to sleep.

## **The Shadow of a Smile**

(i)

To an outsider theirs was a match made in heaven. They seldom fought, or so it seemed, but Jacqui would tell you otherwise. She is a medical doctor at Settler's Hospital and her husband, a Commander at the 6SAI Battalion. She also thought theirs was what ignites a spark of envy. Their only daughter attended pre-school at Jack & Jill in Beaufort Street. They both shared the responsibility of fetching her at 17h00pm from her afterschool program. That is if the father was not deployed on some peacekeeping mission somewhere distant. Then and then would she have to hire a transport for their daughter.

The intercom blurted out the caution, "Calling Dr Watson! Dr Watson please report at the main Theatre ASAP!" This interrupted a somewhat intimate discussion between the newly-weds. "Oh! I really must like this job. Perfect timing. Look, Alex hold on to that thought because I might want to take you up on it."

"No probs hon, just don't forget it."

She just waved him good bye and blew him a kiss as she turned the corner, pressed the button summoning the elevator. He stood there looking at her behind as she wiggled in those navy pants and a pink blouse, with the stethoscope casually hanging about her neck. "Damn isn't she sexy", he found himself thinking out loud. He took out his ring from his finger, put it in his jeans' front pocket. He turned and went for his motorbike. It was parked in front of the glass door entrance at the Out-Patients Division. He went past the motorbike, stopped at the railings on the parking lot and reached for his cellphone on the inner pocket of the leather jacket. Dialed a number and listened. "Talk."

"Mission temporarily aborted," said the voice on the other side.

"Reason?"

"Mistaken identity, Sir."

"You fool! Go and find the real target."

"I'm on it, Sir."

A loud beep as he hung-up. He looked flustered, felt for his gun which he holstered at the back on his waist, for an easy pull should the need arise. He wanted to go back inside. In fact, he wanted to go to the ICU to see if it's not the target that has just been admitted. How is he going to do that? Because Jacqui is going to see her. He was unsure what move to make. Indecisive. Damn you! You clown. This time you are going down. The gravedigger has dug a hole so deep that he became oblivious of his own mortality.

(ii)

Meanwhile the clown was busy making balloon toys for the kids at the Carnival. He suspected that someone had been sent to kill him. Since he became a witness at the murder case of one of the insatiable cougar's clients. He shook the thought out of his mind. He is being paranoid that's all. He suffered a strange relapse of thoughts, they came and flooded his mind. He continued with his antics always saying his famous epithet: "*The Shadow of Your Smile!*" and accompany it with a sullen laughter. They moved from street to street and at every side street or adjacent avenue he made sure that he was among the crowd. He did not want to expose himself to any possibility of being poached. They approached the International Convention Centre, where the actual ceremony would be held. He became more relieved at the sight of policemen. There were so many of them some on motorbikes, some on horses, police cars with sirens and even Saracens. The whole city turned blue.

A shot reverberated outside as the queue was filing at the entrance. Everybody now was galvanized into action. Some were panicky and started scattering all over the place. The Shooter ascended the stairs in haste, went to the landing at the bottom of the stairway. Thanks to his security uniform no-one suspected him. The police dispersed and were more alert and vigilant. They scouted the area. Any suspicion arousing character they rounded up and searched. The Shooter produced his name tag and clipped it on his chest as per customary security procedure. The clown was hit just below the right arm, because of the impetus of the bullet he sprawled on his back. The Shooter caught a glimpse of him being brought on a stretcher to the ambulance. He Immediately knew that he had missed. He was vexed. He needed to call the Contact and brief him about the mission. He knew that he is in hot water, and he would have to act fast.

(iii)

After hanging up on the caller, he started his motorbike and cruised towards the boom gate. The security guard on duty opened for him to pass. It was clear to him that if he wanted something done, he should do it self

So he drove past the boom gate and accelerated speed. He hesitated for a minute at the T-junction and turned right towards the city center. Now the bike was on full throttle. He reached Oakwood Spar and decided to fill up. He turned left and entered the garage at Spar. Since he was a regular there the attendants did not ask him what type of fuel, he simply took off his helmet and told them how much he would like to be filled. Meanwhile he went in and bought himself a steak and kidney pie with coke. Indecision again. Should he call the cougar, maybe he should head straight home or perhaps he should go to the Range? His cellphone rang, he went towards the ATMs and held both the coke and his half eaten pie on one hand and with the other he pulled his cellphone from his jacket's inner pocket and answered. "Talk."

"The target is found, but it's code red."

"By *jings* man! I told you to muffle the *oke*, and I'm sure by now even the veriest greenhorn knows."

"I will go and make the code blue tomorrow, Sir."

"You'd better do that; did you get where he's been dulcied?"

"I heard talk of Groote- Schuur, when I left the scene."

"Good, now go finish your biz bru. Don't, and don't call me till you're done ok?"

"Chrystal."

So the conversation ended. He'd lost his appetite by now, he simply tossed the remaining chunk of the pie onto the wastebin. He guzzled the coke and went to his motorbike. He paid the attendant, started his bike and sped off. Jealousy cauterized him to such an extent that he ordered the silencing of two people. He was homebound. Speedily and in haste.

(iv)

It was about 6 o'clock when Jacqui exited the main Theatre. She headed straight to the staff showers and ante-room. She took a quick shower, changed to the dress she'd brought, tied her hair into a ponytail and slid her feet into some pumps. Her looks contrasted her age. She reached for her handbag and took out her cellphone. Her mind was chaos.

"Oh shit! Look at the time."

The phone had registered 18 missed calls and 3 voice messages. She went for the voice messages and retrieved.

*"You have 3 new voice messages. Please press 1 to listen, press 2 to save and press # to delete."*

*Message 1:* "Honey, there is something that I've got to tell you. Promise you won't freak out. Please do call me soon as you get this message."

*Message 2:* "Babe, I may come home late this evening. Please don't wait up."

*Message 3:* "Something work related came up. I promise to make it up to you, I love you!" *Press 1 to listen to your messages again, press # to delete and press 0 to hang-up or simply hang-up.*

(v)

Alex Watson blundered to his business associate's apartment. Fumingly he knocked and entered even before anyone had answered. He picked up the remote-control and turned the tv down. "Hello, hon is that you?" a man's voice echoed from the bathroom. Alex pulled out his gun and quickly tiptoed towards the bathroom door. He tried to open it. It was locked from the inside. The man, who was busy shaving, put down his hair-trimmer and absent-mindedly opened the door. He was shocked now as he faced the muzzle of a revolver. Alex cocked the gun and thereafter reiterated the man's own words: "*The Shadow of Your Smile*" and then shot him three times. Once on the forehead and twice in the chest. He sprawled backwards and fell into the empty bath and that was the end of him.

## **The Public Hide and Speak**

His person was always jovial with the looks of a youth. Always greets with courtesy both young and old. Spoke the truth even in vile times. Our village composed of a few houses to the extent everyone knew everyone's business. Most of us guys were occasional drinkers. He did not touch the bottle. When other boys played ball, he sat indoors reading a book or watching to. He was everyone's favourite in our village, except for us boys. We called him a *sissy* even *mama's baby*. One day we once cornered him and pulled down his shorts to see what species was he. He was furious to the extent that what we saw as childish platitude, ended in a brawl. Real fisticuffs. His strength and agility were amazing. We grew up from this village and he is from the city of many lights and fast cars. His parents came here to spread the Word. They stayed at the Missionary. His father was the priest and his mother a teacher. He reported the incident to his mother and fire and brimstone reigned on us. We were ordered to the *bench*.

Everyone who once attended Brandeston Higher Primary School knows the *bench*. No one was immune to the *bench*. Even bigger boys feared it. It is a simple procedure where you lie flat on your stomach on a bench, bigger boys hold your hands and your feet. Then you are given a substantial amount of lashes with a cane, enough to make you unable to sit on your behind for 2-3 days. Many are the times when the teacher has had to face the indignation of some parent over their child. This sort of punishment has been the source of many of us leaving school. We hated it as much as we were scared of it. One Sunday the church elders had to intervene, Thembela's mother was fuming with rage. She so much as wanted to lay her hands on the teacher for beating up her child like that. Thembela's mother is one of those who are long-sufferers. She can take so much without complaining. But you dared not touch her child. *Yho!* That one will pounce on you like an elephant with a toothache if you so much as touch her child.

On this day the teacher was leading the sermon, as her husband had attended a convention at the city of many lights and fast cars. She was talking about the Ten Commandments and their importance in life of a Christian. In came Thembela's mother dragging the limping Thembela by the arm. "Do you see the results of your handiwork?" "Huh?" People were still to recover from the shock of confrontation, when she delivered a full clap across the face of the teacher and the teacher reciprocated. A scuffle ensued. The elders had to separate the now heaving two women. "Let me be! I want to show this slut! I want to show her people. Clearly she does not know

people!” “*Rha!* Beating up my child like that. Why don’t you beat that *Moffie* of yours!” By this time, she was heaving and moving up and down. The elders came and spoke to her calmly. She yelled at them, they reasoned with her until she could hear. Themabela’s father liked drinking a lot. This particular day was no exception, he was drunk as usual and did not know his wife had beaten the teacher. Not that it would change anything. So the service had come to an abrupt end without an “*Amen*”. People went home in groups. It was clear that they were discussing today’s mishap. Nothing goes undiscussed in our village, even those that are meant to be hidden. They are brought to the fore in one way or the other. The following Monday we were sent home early. There was to be no schooling because the PTA had organized a meeting pertaining yesterday’s event. The meeting was to be held at the school premises as the church hall was at the Mission. A neutral venue was deemed necessary. Both Themabela’s mother and father were summoned at the meeting. The teacher was also called to attend as the elders and the PTA wanted to hear both sides of the story. People braced themselves for more “action”, to their surprise there was not even a commotion.

The meeting went as planned and was adjourned without hindrance. Everyone was curious about what the resolutions of the meeting were. The chairman said the matter was resolved and people need to look forward instead of instigating hatred. Since that day the *bench* abolished, we don’t know whom to thank.

## Promises Galore

He came to my house the other day, dragging along his bulging suitcase. Not to mention his harem. He asked me to help him with his luggage. The darned thing was extremely heavy. He said he was coming to my side of town to dispense promises. “You mean to tell me that this suitcase is laden with promises.” “Hahahahahaah! Promise all sorts my brother, *ek se vir jou.*” And he was not lying. He had all kinds and sizes:

Promises for toddlers

Promises for kids

Promises for teenagers

Promises for the youth

Promises for adults

Promises for the middle-aged

Promises for the aged

He had something for everyone. Like the politician he is, he sometimes gave the wrong promises to the wrong designated group. Those who were fortunate to be promised would brandish them for all to see. He laughs about being in control. “If people come to you for something, it means you are in control. Control is power.”

He came to my house the other day. He was running for dear life. The teenagers and the youth were hot on his heels. They were accusing him of giving them the wrong “Promise-quota”. They were aware of the quota system and how much promises each person was entitled to. Seemingly he had exceeded his quota. Meanwhile I was busy engaging the teenagers and the youth, he was busy rummaging in his suitcase. He was looking for whatever he would salvage from the promises he’d brought with him. It was likely that even his harem, they had taken their share of promises and left. I asked the mob to practice leniency on him. They said that because I said so, just for my sake they will leave him be for now.

He came to my house the other day. Carrying his Service Delivery Manual. He said he was getting all geared up for 2019. His Manual was printed in Singapore; it was not easy to decipher.

He said he was going to hire experts to unpack it for him. “Being a politician is hard job. You worry about the welfare of the people.” He is sweating profusely. His trademark is the potbelly, claims he graduated from the island. He calls it the Ireland. “This thing is not easy to follow, it’s too complicated for the African who graduated from *Klipgoier* to kleptomania; from shoplifting to looting; from pickpocketing to sloganeering; from empty-pockets to being captured.” “People have got to understand it is not easy for me too. Do they think it is easy to dispense promises? Some even offer bribes just to jump the line to be the first to get promises. I am bound to accept bribes otherwise I will seem a stumbling block between people and their promises.” “This my brother is the *Promised Land*.” He dozes off and snores heavily. He talks in his sleep, sometimes even cries. He promises me that he will soon get on top of things. He just needs to up his game and see it is going to be lit. Whatever that means?

He came to my house the other day. He was agitated to a point of losing his mind. He was incoherent and not making sense, except when he was swearing. “Ungrateful dogs. Blood-sucking vampires. Who do they think they are?” *Incoherent mumbling...* “bread the buttered side flat on the ground.” Today no amount of promising would quell the fire of his raged soul. He was mad. He dragged his suitcase out from underneath my paint-tins supported bed. He was so enraged that I felt sorry for whoever was the cause of anger and for him too. He left my house without ever saying a word, not even promising to come back.

### **The man and his muthi**

The silence sliced through the night, thus cutting it into two halves like a sharp edged sword. Contrary to the scream that shone through before it, it was not attention seeking but a sign of malcontent. The daughter of the house was heaving and her blood splashed bosom moving up and down. She bled from the incisions on her forehead and atop each breast. These were carefully administered by the medicine-man. An old blanket (*umrhaji*) spread on the floor provided for a mat as the floor of the *rondavel* had recently been smeared with fresh cow-dung. The house redolent of blood and cow-dung. The mother of the house was sitting on a straw mat on the other side of the hearth, which was situated on the center of the *rondavel*. She too nursed incision marks by the same man. She was urging her daughter to be strong now for the sake of her life. This stems from the fact that the father of the house chose to abandon his family. Yes, he left intentionally left them and decided to stay with one of his concubines on the other side of the township. It is believed that they did not see eye to eye with the mother of the house. This has left both mother and daughter vulnerable to opportunists and chancers. He was the sole breadwinner in the house and he knew that too.

He left because he wanted to spite the mother of the house. The daughter of the house was their only child in this wedlock. The medicine-man was now finishing his operation on the daughter of the house. He had carefully applied the *muthi* (*umhlabela*) on the girl. As per any other procedure, they were given another concoction to wash with. Meanwhile the medicine-man was busy cleaning his tools outside (talk about a wolf sharpening his fangs upon seeing a prey). The medicine-men dressed in his white overcoat hummed a traditional song. The mother of the house entreated the medicine-man to the house after they had washed. They drank tea and engaged in friendly talk. They spoke about many issues. They even spoke about the absence of the father of the house. The medicine-man's heart jumped when this was confirmed. After they had drunk tea and having had their supper, they felt they were weary and needed some sleep. The daughter of the house was asked to go and lay the medicine-man's sleeping mat and ready the blankets at the *rondavel*. They all curtsied to the medicine-man and each went to sleep.

The mother of the house slept snugly and soundly that night. Whether it was because of the medicine-man's presence or the contentment and faith in his *muthi*, it couldn't be established.

Both mother and daughter woke feeling refreshed and since it was a weekday they roused the children to get ready for schooling. They woke up and made the fire upon which they put the water to boil. Whilst the daughter was busy preparing the children's uniforms, her mother went to the rondavel to enquire about the medicine-man's sleep. "I slept well, oh! Well-slept mother of the house. Except that there are rats here but they can't bother me, and how was your night?" "I slept well too. After a long time, I can say last night I slept like a baby. Thanks to your medicine."

"Oh! Don't mention mother of the house. I have done nothing major. Hehehee!"

"Would you like to have your tea now, or maybe later when you've come to the house?"

"No, I'll come to the house and have tea with both of you later. If that's fine with you."

"Oh! That's fine. Well let me leave you to do whatever you were doing. I'll see you then."

"Go well mother of the house."

And so she left him going into the house and her daughter was about to accompany the children to school. The children were unaware of the medicine-man's presence at their home. That was until one of them bumped into him when she went to wash her teeth outside. She came in running. "*Yintoni Siya?*" enquired the daughter of the house. "What is it that you are scared of?" "*Ndibone omnye utamkhulu phaya?*"

"*Myekeni*, he is our visitor." So the daughter of the house had to explain to the children about the presence of the medicine-man. On the way they asked so many questions until the daughter of the house could not answer anymore. She left them at the school gate and went on home. She thought of last night's rendezvous with the medicine-man. How she had managed to sneak out of the house unnoticed and even in the morning when she sneaked back in. She thought about the way the medicine-man had touched her, how warm and tenderly she had received him. She had opened her receptacle to accept his manhood in her. The medicine-man poured all his core in her and now she feels lighthearted and rejuvenated.

She walked with her head held up high and with the comportment of someone young. Of course she thought of herself as young despite having born three kids of her own. The medicine-man made her feel wanted again, she was just worried about the time he was to spend with them. How she wished she could elope with him for she knew her mother would not consent to their having an affair. She was woken from this daydreaming by her arrival at the gate. She abandoned all

thoughts about her new lover, the medicine-man. She went past the rondavel and heard some giggling and the hoarse laughter of the medicine-man and was overjoyed. She hurriedly went into the house to put some water on the fire, for she had to wash meanwhile her mother was still busy with the medicine-men. She could be inquisitive, her mother. So it's better this way. They did not notice her arrival the medicine-man was being amorous with the mother too. This was done in lieu of the daughter's ignorance about such conduct. She must never find out or she will not want to use his medicine anymore. The mother being possessed by the thirst of her loins, agreed to a vow of secrecy (now the wolf has pounded on both ewe and lamb). After a while the mother of the house took the cups on which they'd had their tea to the house to rinse them. To her dismay her daughter had arrived and was preoccupied by the process of cleansing herself before another rendezvous. The mother did not say anything to her daughter, she just rinsed the cups and prepared mealie-porridge for breakfast. The mother also felt good about herself. After her husband's departure she never thought that she still has it in her to gratify a man. It's been years since her husband left her, even before then they were no longer doing it. Well not as often. Now this the medicine-man has shown her (to his benefit) that she still has it. The porridge was ready and she dished for everyone and called their visitor to come and have breakfast with them. For the first time in years she could hear birds singing and chirping beautifully on trees and dogs squirming and stretching their empty beings on the grass. The day was beautiful thanks to the medicine-man, he is breathtakingly amazing (no pun).

“Would you have breakfast with us, or should I bring yours?”

“No, no need to bring mine here. I'll eat with you; I am coming now.”

“Okay.”

The old lady could not help but feel a bit bushy-tailed. The medicine-man spent only one night with this family and their cups overflow. The daughter finished cleansing and readied herself for another operation. They had their breakfast and the air had an awkward demureness about it. They ate silently and went on their daily routines. The medicine-man asked for a pick-axe to go and dig some wanted herbs to “strengthen” the house. It is good that both rituals are performed. He went on and they were left alone. They busied themselves with the household chores, never forgetting to steal a gaze towards the veld where the medicine-man had disappeared. Samp with

beans was prepared for later. The mother of the house did not forget to bake for her grandchildren. She also followed suite by cleansing herself before preparing any meals. She went and made the medicine-man's sleeping mat, folded his blankets all the while she was singing. She exuded love and abundantly. People knew this medicine-man. He has been to some of the houses here. On his mission to heal the ailing of course. He was there for the sick and for the lonely, an afflatus. He had a "good-heart", the medicine-man. Out of the goodness of his heart he had researched on the family and found them wanting.

He cured all manner of ailments from the sickly frail, to the barren, from the impotent to the jobless. He was most revered for court-cases and deeply feared for manufacturing "thunder and lightning." One dared not cross his path. All of this though was only hearsay, for no live victim of his "thunderstorm" could testify and neither were there witnesses on his prowess of winning court-cases. He was a medicine-man all the same. He came back almost at the same time with the return of school children. He carried his bag of medicine a-piggyback. He put the pick-axe besides the rondavel and went in to put his bag inside. The kids were a bit wary of this stranger. You know what they say with children. They easily pick-up the vibes. So was the case with the medicine-man. "*Inganathi*, go and call the elder in the rondavel."

"Yes *Gogo*, I am just finishing taking off my uniforms."

Inga ran out of the house, and went straight to the rondavel. She greeted the old man and said what she was told fast and quickly ran back. She then took her food and ate as fast as she could for she was in a hurry to play with her mates, who by this time had gathered in the lawn. Again the medicine-man did obediently as he was told. The atmosphere was better though for now everybody was convivial and agreeable. They chatted and laughed for a longer part of the meal. Then the medicine-men left saying he was in a hurry to clean and neatly arrange his herbs at the rondavel. "Of course, of course you may attend to your medicine, they are the reason you are here in the first place."

"I need to take a nap after this meal, I feel a bit tired." The daughter of the house said when collecting the dishes.

The same routine was followed at supper. In fact, for days the situation was to remain like this. The medicine-man assumed the role of a father in the house, he fixed the fence. Made a wooden gate instead of the corroded iron gate, which did not serve its purpose. He cleaned the weeds out

of the yard and even made a small vegetable garden. All this time he was doing both mother and daughter. By now both had their suspicions and dared not ask for fear of giving out the secret. He was a skillful womanizer the medicine-man. He knew the tricks of the trade inside out. Life has its own surprises; after a long time, the medicine-man had been staying with them something struck. The daughter of the house suspected that she had skipped going to the grass. The mother of the house had her own suspicions, she saw her daughter becoming full and round. Then she was constantly nauseous and vomiting. She decided there and then that it was time they buried their secret and come out with it. She asked her one day when they were together. "Baby, are my suspicions true about you."

"About what now Ma?"

"I have a gut feeling that you are heavy with child."

"What if it's just false alarm Ma?"

"It is not trust me; I know these things."

"Aw! Ma please stop it?"

"I was curious to know the father, since now you never go out."

"You will know once I know for sure that I am pregnant."

"It'd better be..." she cut herself short of saying "It'd better be not my medicine-man?" She almost forgot that he was not hers and that theirs were just stolen moments of enjoying each other. Days went by and the bulge developed. Now the medicine-man had advised the daughter of the house to stop coming to his sleeping mat. Lest they be caught. It was too little and too late, for on that night the woman of the house called for a special meeting. She wanted to know what was happening in her house? She would never share a man with her daughter, never. The medicine-man packed her belongings and put them on one side of the rondavel. He only left the herbs that he had put there to dry. When the time for the meeting came, he sneaked out of the rondavel with his haversack and ran towards the police station. This he did so that he could be safe should there be anyone who decides to pursue him. That was the last time anyone heard from him.