Love and Revolution are two words rarely used together. Where love is associated with passion, desire and romance, revolution is often associated with revolt, uprising, riot and change, these seemingly opposing emotions. But love has the power to transform us in ways that not even we can imagine and sometimes love and revolution are in fact two sides of the same coin.

This volume represents the first year of the newly inaugurated POWA Women’s Writing Project. No longer a competition, this year’s collection tells of diverse women’s experiences of love: romantic love, love of family, love of friends, love of community – love that touches us in revolutionary ways that alters how we see and approach life.

Sometimes the most revolutionary act is to love. And sometimes the revolution is an act of love.

POWA’s vision is to create a safe society that does not tolerate violence against women, where women are powerful, self reliant, equal and respected. POWA’s mission is to be a specialised and multi-skilled service provider that contributes towards the complete eradication of violence against women in society. POWA provides counselling, legal advice, court support and shelter to women survivors of domestic violence.

Contact POWA on 011 642 4345 or visit our website www.powa.co.za
Breaking the Silence

Love & Revolution

Funded by:
About the artwork

The artwork reproduced in this edition are the result of the ongoing collaboration that POWA has with the CDP Trust. This partnership is now in its fifth year, and it draws on the CDP’s approach to creating visual narratives, enabling healing, and making advocacy media through the arts and their cultural forms.

In February 2011 the CDP facilitated a narrative and message-making process through a module within the POWA’s RAISING HER VOICE workshop. The process drew on the powerful symbolism of hands; hands as identity, hands that heal, hurt and hold, work, play, communicate, comfort and speak out! Engaging in creative activity, with or without prior art-making experience, opens up safe spaces for sharing personal stories, for sharing hopes and fears and releasing anger and hurt. Through these processes the individual narratives become a collective narrative – empathetic shared experiences of women dealing with violence and demanding their rights to justice and protection in a gendered society.

Art-making workshop facilitated by Charlotte Schaer  
(CDP Trust)  
Photography: Charlotte Schaer
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This anthology contains the selected entries submitted to People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA). The writing project has established itself as a pivotal platform to promote women’s writing as a way of healing by breaking the silence to increase discussion and debate about women’s issues and struggles and to encourage women to write creatively.

The women’s writing project was launched as an annual project in 2004 as part of POWA’s 25th anniversary celebrations. The theme for the 2010 project was: Love and Revolution.

In the most recent past, POWA commissioned an external evaluation of the project and many useful recommendations emerged on how to improve the project’s accessibility to women. The most significant shift has been to move from the competition format used in previous years, in favour of a more feminist approach that values each written work equally.
This year, we also partnered with three human rights organisations who assisted us in identifying women participants for our workshops in Gauteng, the Western Cape, and KwaZulu-Natal. In Gauteng we partnered with women activists from different organisations, in the Western Cape we partnered with Sikhula Sonke Women Farm Workers, and in KwaZulu-Natal we worked with a social movement organisation called Abahlali baseMjondolo.

We received poems, short stories and personal essays from across South Africa in four of the official languages. We thank all the entrants for their courage in sharing their writing and their most intimate stories with POWA. The stories in this anthology were selected and edited by an editorial committee made of: Liz Trew, who chaired the Committee; Jeanette Sera from POWA; Sixolile Ngcobo from Oxfam GB, Thokozile Budaza, and Caroline Zoh Akiy Mbi-njifor from Engender health. We thank them for their time and commitment.

This anthology would not have been possible without the financial support of the National Lottery Distribution Fund. Their support has contributed a lot to the expansion and continued success of the project.

We are also thankful to the women who produced the artwork contained in this anthology. The artwork was produced by participants of POWA’s RAISE HER VOICE project, where POWA partnered with the Curriculum Development Project (CDP) Trust to run an art advocacy session with participants from partner organisations.
Foreword

As always, we look forward to receiving submissions for next year’s anthology, details of which will be posted on the programme’s website, www.womenswriting.org.za, and advertised in the media.

Nonhlanhla Sibanda  
Project Coordinator

Nehwoh Belinda  
Assistant Coordinator

Liz Trew  
Chair of the Editorial Board
Love and Revolution are terms rarely used together within the same context. Where love is associated with passion, desire and romance, revolution is often associated with revolt, uprising, riot and change, these seemingly opposing emotions. Yet, often when we talk about love, what are we really referring to? Is love a feeling, an emotion, or is it just mere preference? Love comes in different forms: parental love, affectionate love, sisterly love. I believe that no matter which form of love we talk of, what we are really talking about is not just the feeling of love, it is the power to transform us in ways that even we could not have imagined.

All the stories and poems in this collection are mediums through which different women chose to portray and share their Love and Revolution. This publication seeks to provide a platform for women to speak about issues that affect them, and the theme Love and Revolution is aimed at demystifying the misconceptions around love and through the various short stories and poems, women prove that the two are closely linked together.
The power of love that transforms us through altering our perception of life will often influence our actions and it begins to appear that Love and Revolution are in fact two sides of the same coin. We observe from this collection of stories that perceptions created from real life experiences fuel militancy, aggression, revolt, uprise, riot and change because we now no longer can conform, be boxed in and confined to the norm but rather we rise to take matters into our own hands because our experiences have taught us what we know about our realities, yes we live life, we live love according to us – and that becomes revolutionary.

This moving and powerful collection of writing offers an insight into the journeys of different women that have experienced love in different forms in revolutionary ways that altered their approach to life. From the story of an activist who, by the power of love, saw things differently and by the power of the same love caused a revolution within her community, to the story of a 'loveless' but independent woman who accidentally but radically found her way back into the world of love through relating with a stray dog.

Society has framed what love is and what it should be, this has resulted in dangerous linear views and notions around the issue of love. The radical stories contained herein are inspired by women who, through their experiences, broke out of the mould and crossed boundaries causing a revolution and change in their situations.
Introduction

As these women speak out, let us take time to reflect on our own various situations in light of the lessons drawn from their stories and let us use that to cause a revolution in our own spaces through the power of love and let us always remember ...

Sometimes, the most revolutionary act is to love and sometimes the revolution is an act of love.

Nonhlanhla Sibanda
Project Coordinator
POETRY
Love and Revolution

by Kerry Jane Gutridge

Through love,
In love,
We evolve

In order to evolve
We need to revolve

When there is no growth
Love stagnates, goes elsewhere;
Love, like water, cannot be broken,
But love, like water, can go underground,
Withhold herself.

As at such a South African time
When most of our water is poisoned,
We need a revolution of loving:
To find fresh springs,
Ways of making our dirty water clean.

At such times
The revolution is revived.
You rebelled against the culture of respecting me as a person
Went against morals and values
When you bashed my face blue
Left me in ICU
You forgot the golden rule – to do unto others, what you want done unto you
When you tore my clothes, my clitoris, my life apart
You went against what is right
My RIGHTs
When you chose to be wrong
You wronged my body and my mind,
But … my soul?
Not my soul
Never my soul!

Let me first spit in your face – it’s only fair
Then I’ll give you my other cheek
Rebel against your system to keep me weak
Yes my body is sore, damn sore!
Lovely Revolution

Yes my mind scared!
Let me make this clear
My soul is my core
Besides my mind is putting on a provisional façade.

The love I have for life your revolution can never …
I love you for even thinking you could dare savage my soul
Ha! ICU … Do you see me in control?
I am the author of my life
I am opposing women abuse
I am in love with my life
I am revolutionising against the system of systematic fear
Not this women’s soul
Oh no, my dear.

I am the author of my life
I am opposing women abuse
I am in love with my life
Locked in my own prison

I peered through life
Only in the looking glass
Not one to experience discord
But now am undone
My enclosure wrecked
For one has found me

Reached in and unbound me

The moment I knew love
The shackles broke away
Giving me a new beat
As I saw into another’s dream
The rain cloud cleared
As I left my world of emptiness
And saw the daisies dancing in the wind
Freedom

New life sang in my bloodstream
My need for his constant sun
In my universe spiralling
Everywhere
Has given me a sun that sets
Only to meet its moon
A light spirit in the dark
Evening

In a land unknown we dance together

All that I knew left behind
With hammering heart
We colour the world with our dreams
As our universes intermingle
The darkness of my solitude is done
He – my Sun God
Nothing is as it did seem.

We colour the world with our dreams
As our universes intermingle
I could sell my soul for a hundred bucks and lay you
down if I were hungry enough,
knowing that you will willingly lead me to the place
where bodies meet.
More than ready to part with your hundred for a hunger
we both know one time with me can never quench.
So who is the criminal?
Is it me for taking your money and your plastic wrapped
semen as I pretend not to stare at your ring finger? Coz
today I am just that hungry?
Or is it you who does not bat an eyelid as I lay out the
conditions for a moment of pleasure with my young
nubile self?
Or is government the criminal because social security
is someone else’s joke as they laugh at me when I ask
where my rights to food and water are?
Or is it AIDS the bloody killer who is responsible for
the loss of an entire generation in our home and left me
the mother of four at fifteen with nothing to give but my
vagina for a night of peace from rumbling stomachs?
Yet still you look away because how can you answer my questions?
It is better you didn’t see the questions and I stopped wanting you to see them,
but just existed as a lustful thought to you.
Leaving the questions that bring wondering if God really has another plan or if I am meant only for this kind of life somewhere less complex and overwhelming than the “you here and now”.
Hunger has a sound and you can hear it coming, even as the last crumb rests in your stomach,
the ache which haunts you even in your sleep begins to threaten and the baby begins to cry.
What can you give her, you wonder, water won’t calm her down and there is no more newancwa to soothe the sound that makes her cry ... who can I turn to for help today?
Then you came along as I was walking to the communal tap,
you didn’t think I’d noticed you all those other times you accidentally on purpose passed me by, staring one beat too long and smiling questioningly one tooth too wide at me.
Silently asking – TODAY?
It’s tempting as I think of the hundred that could feed us for weeks ...
So easy, because this burden is just too heavy, too deep and too wide
For my shoulders to have to carry.
Just as the reasons begin to stack up and I see your invitation as relief ... as a break ...
I remember the words of Make Mgcugcuteli
“a one minute short-cut could cost you the rest of your life”
And I think of two now having to play number one as I leave her behind with three to be mother of ...
And her choice in this imaginary future is staring back and asking me – will she ever be free?
Or am I starting a cycle of broken choices?
So I choose to listen to Nembeza and drive out the fear, I fill my fifteen litres of water and walk the five kms back home in hunger to water the small vegetable patch and pick the lonely growing spinach ...
This is not the end for me.
Has not her love held me together when hope walked out of my life and left a despair instead?
So tonight *angeke silale nge manti labilisiwe* and next week cabbage, maybe more ...
I won’t take your money at the price of my soul
I’m starting a revolution fighting to choose love and life...

*Has not her love held me together when hope walked out and left despair instead?*
The True Definition of a Woman

by Nthabiseng Josephine Mofolo

It is in my smile where my beauty shines through, a beauty not defined by my physical features nor by material possessions, but by my inner being;
It is in my touch that my warmth is extended, a warmth that silences the anguished cries of an infant, and makes even the most hardened of criminals melt;
It is in my strength where I find the courage to go on in the face of insurmountable obstacles and overwhelming challenges, and to pick up my fellow comrades who have given up along the way;
It is in my voice where the pain and sorrow of someone who has endured years of abuse is echoed, a voice though largely ignored, that will never be silenced;
It is in my eyes where my story is told, a story of all the struggles I have had to endure, and a story of how I overcame even though many chose to turn a blind eye;
It is in my heart that my love is generated and radiates towards my beloved friends and family, princes and vagabonds alike;
It is in my head where I carry the intellect to educate a
nation, and in my mind where dreams are born, dreams that will shape the future of this nation;
It is in my womb that a new life is formed, a life that will make a positive contribution to the world, and pay homage to its Creator;
It is on my shoulders where I bear the burden of every woman and child who has ever let out a cry for help, only to be let down by the justice system;
It is in my feet where you will find the swiftness with which I will run to a sister in need, and with my feet that I stand up against injustice;
Most importantly, it is in my being that you see me for who and what I am: a woman born to conquer the world.

It is on my shoulders where I bear the burden of every woman and child who has ever let out a cry for help
He loves me
He says, he loves me
Black eyes, broken bones and bruises
He shows the way he loves me.
Shame and fear are sure controls.

She loves me
My whore, my slave, my object, my thing
Always at my beck and call.

Does he love me? It chokes me
When I think about it, it pokes me
Through me his material world is displayed.
Through me love is misunderstood.

She loves me
Without me she’s nothing
She cannot live without my cash
Like all my possessions
Like the life I gave her
Breaking the Silence

Like she does whatever I want and when I want her to.

He loves me
I am crippled and stripped
My mind, body and soul now belong to him
Is this it?
To love?

Through me love is misunderstood
SHORT STORIES
The attendance at her funeral was surprising. It was not only the large numbers that turned up, but also the “who’s who” that were there. She, who abhorred funerals, who stopped going to them as a protest against unnecessary deaths of young people, was now, in her death, being honoured in a way that she disapproved of.

“If you want to tell me that you love me or hate me, better say it to my face. It is no use telling people how you loved me when I am dead and buried. Then you will be addressing rotten flesh and as far as I am concerned, it is stupid to do that,” she was often heard to say.

Yes, she practised what she preached. If she disapproved of one’s deeds or ways, she made it quite clear to the individual. Likewise, those who were helpful in various ways to the community were always heaped with praise when she talked about them. No, she did not gossip, just said what she felt to those concerned.
She was unpopular in some circles. However, even amongst those, there was a general approval of her campaign. People realised that while she might have been undiplomatic at times, her heart was in the right place and her intentions were for the good of the community. Her devotion and hard work for the good of the women of her village were recognised by all.

It is reported that one morning after the funeral of a young woman, she came home angry and announced that that was the last funeral she would attend.

“That’s enough! If I have to go to one more funeral, I will die from frustration and anger. It used to be funerals on Saturday mornings, now even Sunday mornings. Is there no end to this? No, no more. That’s it for me.”

The HIV/AIDS virus had devastated her village. No, it was not the only village suffering. It was claiming the lives of youths all over the country. Amongst the dead and dying were college students, girls just starting their careers, and even girls in high school. The population of the village was beginning to have predominantly older women, grandmothers, the main survivors left to mind the young children. There was a sadness about and a general worry as to who would be next.

It’s no use telling people how you loved me when I am dead and buried
Even though she worked hard and attained good results in her science teaching, she felt that she and others had failed the children through lack of social guidance. Much against the norm, she embarked on a programme to run classes about sex, venereal diseases and choices. She ran workshops on careers and the importance of independence for women.

In the evening she approached young women who were soliciting, to invite them to her home for a chat. She approached cars cruising the streets and chased them away by taking down the number plates. She encouraged girls to take the test and also campaigned to the government to make free antiretroviral treatment available. This was during the period when there was a general doubt about the virus and the use of such drugs was vilified.

She felt particularly incensed and concerned about the part played by older men who were married and using young girls for sex in this way. After school, she could be seen on a street corner with a placard:

“SEX WAS NEVER MEANT TO KILL BUT IT DOES NOWADAYS”

“GO HOME TO YOUR WIFE, SIR”

Some accused her of ignoring the importance of condoms in her campaign. She countered this by pointing out that condoms were freely available for those who wanted to use them but that she was targeting young girls to encourage them to avoid being exploited; to encourage
them to abstain until they were ready to experience sex with their own age groups and then to practise safer sex when they did.

In one or two cases, she had called a wife if she recognised the woman’s husband cruising around. As she continued, she became bolder in approaching the cruisers and it became dangerous because of threats to her life. One evening, a speeding car missed her by a few inches. As the threats became more serious and frequent, her family begged her to stop. Unfortunately, by then she was too committed.

“No, I am not letting them win this one. If I have to die for it, so be it. My wish is to save girls. If I can get through to just one, it will be good work done for the community and the future of this country. Otherwise, this freedom talked about would be for nothing. No, I am not stopping, not now, not ever!”

On one occasion, as she got back home in the evening, she was accosted at the gate. A man felled her with a blow. She came to in the arms of her cousin who happened to be visiting at the time. Her doctor expressed concern for her safety.

“Look, Ruth, it will not always be a close shave, you know. Please take care. How can you give your life to people you do not even know? Leave it to their mothers, for goodness sake. I will not always be ready to treat you, you know!”
“Well, you are my doctor and I will continue to call for your help and expertise. At any rate, have you not taken one of those oaths, what do they call them? I might just start campaigning against doctors who refuse to treat people or who falsify the causes of death. Yes, I think I should include the part played by doctors in ignoring this disease and looking away when they could help to educate the community. How about that, Doctor. Well?”

“Oh come on Ruth. You know I care about you. I worry about you. Leave this to the younger community members and those who have the power.”

“But that is why we are in this mess. We left it to those in power. Now look. How many girls are positive, Doctor? Would you be so honest as to tell? No, of course not. We are in a sorry state and we cheat ourselves to say the situation is getting better when it is getting worse. How many of your patients have you buried this last week, Doctor?

“No, I will not stop. If I can convince one man or one young girl to change their ways, I will die a happy woman. Do not get me wrong. I do not wish to be careless with my life. I had visions of living long enough to save cash for a trip around the world. Now, the little I put aside is being frittered away by this campaign. But now that there is some awareness in the community, I cannot give up. No!”

“I think I shall have to come out with you some evenings. Yes you are doing good work in raising awareness and
educating our girls. It is only that it is scary to hear people cursing you like they do. I think I will try to persuade my wife to come out with me to stand with you on one of the nights, once a week. Would that help?”

“Oh, would it? Of course. It would help buckets! Once people see you as a couple it would make a big change. You see, one of the slurs about me is that I must be jealous because I am sex starved. Some do not take me seriously because they think I am doing this out of jealously. Others label me a lesbian. Yes, I would appreciate that very much. I tried to rope in some male colleagues but they will not be associated with the campaign.”

From then on the campaign took off. Even the police made an appearance in her vicinity whenever they were out with placards. Some elders in the village joined her campaign. This encouraged her to approach them with a suggestion that they discuss the topic at the kgotla to warn men about the disease and to encourage them to respect themselves and their wives. By this time there had been burials of married women too, due to the virus. Despite that, some of their surviving husbands were known to be carrying on with young girls in the village.
After years of doing this as a lone woman on a street corner, people finally began to join her, both with their voices and also by standing with her on the streets, holding placards.

“Did I see you here last week? You and I seem to be regulars,” one woman asked another at the clinic.

“It is the same old story for me whenever he is around. I just cleared the last infection and it is back now that he is home. Of course he denies that it has anything to do with him and refuses to visit a doctor about it.”

“Join the club! Mine works in that mine,” turning her head leftwards to indicate the nearby goldmine. “I wised up to this and insisted that he consult a doctor whenever he comes home and before we do anything. In the last few months, I have been clear and living happily. He came back unexpectedly last week. This time, I was caught napping and here I am paying the price! You know, we will die unless we refuse sleeping with them altogether. But, try saying that to a man.”

After years of doing this as a lone woman on a street corner, people finally began to join her
“Yes. It is why I am here today. I told him this morning that I was tired of being infected by him, that I would not sleep with him anymore. He came at me, fists, kicks and all. I have bruises all over my body. The shiner you see on my face is nothing compared to how my body feels and looks. But, I mean it, no more. The woman next door has this disease of losing weight. She looks lifeless. Her husband died last month. Even as he lay dying, he would not admit what he was suffering from. Now the poor woman is following him. You know, if we do not take control we will all die.”

It was an open secret that whenever their husbands were home, the wives contracted some form of venereal disease. Most infections were treatable. This “new” disease defied treatment and was made worse by the fact that people were not always prepared to admit that they suffered from it even when it was evident.

Ruth decided to take it upon herself to approach mining companies about their policy of separating husbands from their families. She took courage from the fact that many people joined her in her campaign. One Friday afternoon, she and a small group bearing placards stood outside the gate of the nearby mine.

“YOU MAKE PROFITS FROM OUR GOLD AND THE SWEAT AND BLOOD OF OUR MEN”

“BUILD FAMILY LIVING QUARTERS, IMPROVE PAY, GIVE MEDICAL AID”
“YOU BREAK UP FAMILIES OF MINE WORKERS”

“THE MINERALS BELONG TO THIS COUNTRY. THE PROFITS OUGHT TO IMPROVE OUR LIVES AND NOT KILL US”

It was the first time anyone had been so bold as to approach mining companies. Improved pay and better living conditions in the mines would see the improvement of conditions for all workers, but it was slow in coming. Workers were made to live in hostels and prostitution in the vicinity of such hostels was rife. It even seemed as if the companies encouraged it as they did nothing to chase away any such loiterers. The wives at home paid a heavy price by not only struggling with bringing up families on a pittance but also by contracting infections whenever their husbands were home. Indeed, on the second occasion that the campaign was outside the mine, a woman, in a wheelchair, joined them. She carried a placard:

“THIS MINE KILLED MY HUSBAND. NOW I AM DYING FROM WHAT KILLED HIM. WILL THIS MINE LOOK AFTER MY CHILDREN?”

The group was dispersed with water hoses sprayed at them by mine security staff. As they scattered away, one of the security guards ran close to Ruth and whispered: “It will be bullets next time”.

Ruth realised then that the danger to her and other campaigners was real. She began to minimise appearances outside mines and concentrated on the streets as before.
However, she had started something that should have happened many years ago and some of the supporters continued targeting the mines.

Just a few days after this incident, she was attacked in her bedroom. She is reported to have scratched the assailant so viciously that the people still point at the deep scar he bears on the side of his left eye. As she screamed, pulling hard at his privates, he is said to have screamed even louder than her so that the neighbourhood dogs alerted people to come to the rescue. They, in turn, set upon the man. He spent an extended period in the hospital before doing time in prison.

After this incident, she reduced her street appearances and took to using the internet. She would send personal campaigns to mining companies. She also collected signatures to send to companies and government officials about related issues. She concentrated on the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Mines. She also wrote to various heads of mining companies appealing to them to improve the living conditions and improve pay, offer medical aid and make antiretroviral treatment freely available to their infected workers.

One Friday afternoon, as she made her way home after a rather hectic day, she accepted a sip of a drink from one of the girls she was trying to persuade to stop soliciting.

“She kindly offered me a drink. It was so sickly sweet that I took only a sip and handed it back to her.”
Her doctor was furious. He confirmed that she must have been poisoned. He did not know what antidote to use. He tried everything, including inducing vomiting. By Monday she was dead. The said girl pleaded innocence and had to be taken into custody for her own safety.

At the funeral many people wept openly. As she had always deplored addresses and praises for the dead, there were no speeches. Some did it her way. They carried placards. One simply read:

“SHE SAVED MY LIFE. SHE DID NOT DESERVE TO DIE”

To some, the girl swore that she had the same drink herself. Others reported that she was given the drink by a man driving past in the car who had said, “You see that woman standing there? She works so hard, she is my sister. Take this to give to her.”

The community carries on with her work as they pledged at the funeral. Antiretroviral drugs are becoming readily available. In her death she achieved more than she had hoped for.
“Phew! I would sell my grandmother for a cup of tea right now,” Arlene exhales explosively. The Hot Shots are in the dressing room. Arlene and her clique are changing. With a flourish Cassandra waves a flask aloft and calls out, “Now let’s see … whose granny have I bought?”

Arlene bows deeply, Cassandra bows deeply, “Si, si Signora. At your service.”

Arlene accepts the tumbler of black, sweet tea gratefully. She sips with pure pleasure.

Cassandra then asks, “And when do I collect my recycled granny?”

Kate’s exaggerated laugh sounds more like the excited braying of a donkey.

“Do you know Arlene’s granny?” The girls laugh out loud.
Fay wipes away tears of laughter. “Yeah, Cass, have you heard her? She has the sharpest tongue!”

A laugh that sounds like the screech of an injured cat escapes from an overcome Dianne who has valiantly tried but failed to suppress her mirth. “Have you met Arlene’s granny, Cass?”

Cass haughtily tosses her head, “No. Does it matter? She’s mine now. I’ve just bought her. For a cup of tea, nogal. Never had parents … grandparents … only foster.”

Francis giggles, “Well, now you have a granny. Isn’t that just too, too twee?”

Dianne manages to splutter, “Yes, Arlene’s granny.”

Arlene scolds, “Here, lay off, you. That’s my gran and I love her!”

Cass lifts a finger and wags it to and fro in front of her face, “Uh-uh; you just sold your beloved granny to me, remember?”

She wriggles slowly and sensuously, cat-like, and folds her arm behind her head, with a look of pure mischievous satisfaction.
Arlene laughs, “Of course; your gran now. Collect her any time you like, just not tonight. I’m bushed. Ta for the tea.” She walks to the sink, rinses the tumbler and hands it back.

The girls disperse.

***

The following morning Arlene is awakened by a knock on the front door. Shocked at the disturbance and hoping her granny is not disturbed, she hastens to attend it. A look at her bedside clock catches her in mid-yawn. 7.10! Who can it be?

“Who’s there?” she snaps rudely. She roughly yanks the door open. “You!” she exclaims in horror.

“Ooohhh, yes! Moi! In ze flesh! I’ve come to collect me bran’ noo gran,” she finishes in an American drawl.


Cass pushes her way in and plonks herself on the sofa. “Shame. As you can see, I’m here … to collect my granny. Is she still in bed?”

“Anyone who could make jokes about selling someone as precious as their grandmother doesn’t deserve one”
Cass makes herself comfortable. She wriggles slowly and sensuously, cat-like and folds her arm behind her head, with a look of pure mischievous satisfaction.

Arlene sighs deeply and says, “Cass, that business of buying my granny – you didn’t take it seriously did you?”

“Of course I did. Didn’t you?”

“Be serious, Cass! Who sells their granny for a cuppa?”

“Oh, but I am ... very serious, Arlene dearest. Anyone who could make jokes about selling someone as precious as their grandmother doesn’t deserve one. And for a cup of tea, nogal. Well! Family is precious. Grannies are to be cherished not sold to the first person with a flask of tea!”

Suddenly there’s a loud knock at the door.

Arlene starts violently and flounces off. “Kate! So early in the morning!”

Kate beams broadly and chirps, “Good morning to you, too, honey. Chill. Saw Cass on my early morning jog. Have I missed anything?”

Cass pipes up, “Oh, but I have. Wasn’t that clear yesterday?”

“Abundantly clear that you’re nuts! Kate, leave now and take Cass with you.”
Cass is stubborn. “I have come to collect my brand new grandmother.”

Arlene hisses at Kate: “This girl is mad. Mad!”

“Mad I may be, but I’ve come to collect, nevertheless.”

There’s another knock at the door. A small crowd pushes passed Arlene, almost knocking her over.

An excited Erica asks, “We’re not too late, are we? I told you to hurry up. Francis! Hey Arlene, what have we missed?”

An exasperated Arlene pleads, “I just wish you’d all get out and leave us alone. This is not a joke anymore. Get out! All of you. Now!”

Erica shoves herself between two figures on the crowded sofa. “Don’t be like that, Arlene. I brought my cousin, Terrence, to watch the proceedings. Nice, juicy bit of news to take home, hey, Tees?” She nudges him sharply and he winces. He sticks out a hand to shake Arlene’s but she ignores it. There is a general pushing and shoving as everyone tries to get comfortably seated.

_Gown badly buttoned, knitted hat awry, specs on the tip of her nose, the old woman pans the crowd, eyes narrowed_
Granny for Tea

A thoroughly disturbed Arlene pleads: “Now look here Cass, enough of this nonsense. Get out! All of you. Out! Go home!”

Di speaks persuasively, “Come now Arlene, we all heard you strike the bargain. You can’t go back on your word. Shylock here wants her pound of flesh; she bought it fair and square.”

A collective giggle.

***

Another loud knocking at the door shuts them up and Fay and Ella enter. Ella looks around at everyone. “Hmm, this is so cosy, isn’t it, Fay? Good thing we were off to the café. Arlene is having a good time without us!”

Fay scolds Arlene, “Shame on you, Arlene, having an early morning soiree without us.”

“Meet the rest of the uninvited guests. Now shoo! Go! And please take them all away with you.”

***

Someone hisses, “Shhhh!” and they become aware of Arlene’s granny’s presence in the archway that leads to the bedrooms. Gown badly buttoned, knitted hat awry, specs on the tip of her nose, the old woman pans the crowd, eyes narrowed. “Here, you lot of hooligans, shut up! What’re you doing here anyway? And so many of
you! Arlene Freeman, is there something you haven’t told me? Get these … these … people out of here … this … minute.”

Everyone’s mesmerised. It’s a snake and bird scenario. “Go on out... all of you O. U. T. Out! Haven’t you got homes? Oooout!”

“Gran! Don’t be upset. They are about to leave … aren’t you?” she stares around her desperately.

“Shut up, girl. If you don’t have the spleen to chase them out, I have,” she waddles to the door. “OUT!” She roars. “Go! YOU! Go tell your mother she’s calling you.”

A long finger points at Di who pleadingly wheedles, “But, Gran, Arlene sold you to Cass and we’ve come to witness the handover.” A number of voices make confirming noises.

“Excuse you? Speak up, Girl!”

Di explains, “Arlene sold you to Cass for a cup of tea ... after hockey yesterday ...” her voice trails off. She covers her burning face then squishes herself behind Erica.

A complete silence follows. All eyes are fixed on Granny. Slowly she nods her head, closes the door and re-enters the living area. Quite unexpectedly she bursts out laughing; so hard, she gropes for a chair which someone has to hastily vacate.
Granny wipes her tears with the corner of her gown. Then she blows her nose on the same corner making an exaggerated sound almost like the foghorn of a ship at sea. They all recoil in horror. Arlene, in sheer embarrassment screams, “Gran!”

Her granny ignores her and sets about rubbing the gown corner slowly between her hands. If anyone notices that it is quite dry, they don’t show it.

“Ja-nee,” the old woman cackles with great enjoyment. “I haven’t had such a good laugh in a long time! Ohhh,” she chortles, “that’s really, really rich.”

She turns to Arlene when she’s stopped laughing. “I’m worth something, hey? Even if it is only a cup of tea.”

Arlene whimpers pitifully, “it was only a joke, Gran.” She looks around her, desperate for affirmation but finds none.

Granny nods continuously. “A joke!?”

Arlene looks pleadingly at her granny, “Yes, Granny, but I was not making fun of you or anything like that, please believe me. It meant nothing.” Her voice becomes feeble, “Just a joke. Really.”

Gran’s voice takes on a resigned tone. “So! I’m a joke, am I? Well!”
Suddenly her expression changes. She smiles sweetly at Cass. “If I understand correctly, you’re the young lady who’s bought me, aren’t you? So, then let’s go; let us away!”

Cass looks quite discomfited, suddenly. “It really was a joke, Gran. I had no intention of taking you away …”

Gran explodes: “No intention, my eye! What are you doing here at this time on a Sunday morning when all self-respecting people are still lying in?” she looks around. “And these, are they sleep-walking? Twaddle! Stuff and nonsense. I’ll be quite happy to leave here,” Gran ignores Cass’s attempt to interject. She looks lovingly at her. “You’ve made my day, love. (Nodding vigorously) Yes, yes you have. Made my day. Now girl go pack my bags,” she cackles uproariously. “The ole bag’s bags, gettit?”

She looks around but no one dares to laugh out loud, “Arlene, show her where my things are.”

When they reach the passageway, Gran assumes her army general’s voice: “Arlene, fetch my church shoes. They need polishing. My new granddaughter’ll do them. Newspaper, too; she mustn’t mess my carpet.”

*Arlene watches her granny’s show of bad table manners in open-mouthed shock*
Cass, protesting cries out, “I’m not…”

“Oh yes you are dearie. You bought me and now you’re stuck with me.”

***

This turning of the table is very interesting and quite exciting. Cass looks daggers at the highly amused audience. Arlene goes to fetch her granny’s brown shoes and the shoe-cleaning paraphernalia.

Gran is having fun. “Arlene, my baby, put two big cases and my clothes on my bed. My Cassie here will pack for her granny.”

A reluctant Cass, her body language screaming rebellion, opens the cake tin, fumbling with the tacky rustiness between the lip of the tin and its lid.

“Time’s a-gettin’ on while you stand gaping like fish out of water. Church is at eleven.”

Arlene tries to plead and cajole, “Gran, you’re taking this thing too far. Enough is …”

“Come again? I’m taking things too far? Who did the selling? Go on, tell me that. And whose Sunday morning was rudely disturbed, hey? Then tell me that I’m the one who’s going too far. You sold me. I belong to the buyer. Simple.”
Acutely embarrassed, Cass holds up the shoes she has been polishing. Gran takes them and turns them around, making clicking and clucking sounds as she does so. Then she sighs very deeply. “Aah! Not as shiny as they usually are, but you’ll learn. This’ll do for now.”

***

“Now go wash your hands and then make new Gran a spot of breakfast. In future you’ll do it without being told. Arlene will tell you what I have and she’ll show you where everything is. Arlene!” She comes running. Cass looks like a landed fish: her mouth opens and closes and her eyes are stricken. Her friends are of no help whatsoever. The open-plan kitchen is right alongside.

Cass says, “You won’t believe this, Arlene…”

“I know. I heard, here, let me help you…”

“Not you!” the Dictator calls out. “My new girl will make my last meal in this house.”

Arlene, done with helping Cass, goes to stand alongside her granny. The old woman lovingly takes hold of her hand. She looks up at her granddaughter and says in a voice that rings with sweet insincerity, “Thank you for all you’ve done for me in the past. Such a pity we have to part this way.”

Arlene cries out, “Oh, Gran, let’s put an end to this nonsense. Can’t you see that it was all just a joke? Just
a turn of phrase; a figure of speech. Please, you guys, go home and let’s end this farce.”

An unforgiving Kate whines, “Don’t be a spoil-sport.” She cranes her neck, looking at Cass in the kitchen, “Cass make sharp. Gran is eating the chair backs.”

Cass shouts, “Coming,” as she enters with a plate in her shaking hands. She shoots Kate a look of pure hatred.

Gran sits bolt upright. “Go show the girl where the trays are, Arlene. And use a tray cloth.”

Di bursts into a fit of nervous giggling, “I wish my mom were here. She’d enjoy this.”

Gwennie joins in the laughter and manages to say, “Don’t forget the price!”

Gran bangs her stick on the floor impatiently. “When’s the food coming? Today?”

Cass whimpers, “Coming…” She enters. “Just as you like it, Arlene said.”

Gran nods her head and says, “You may pour my tea. Arlene will tell you how I like it.”

She proceeds to eat very sloppily and noisily, dunking bits of toast into the egg yolk and sucking noisily at them. “Hmm, not bad. Not bad at all. In fact better than any eggs Arlene has cooked for me. Ever! You’ll
definitely do. At least my breakfasts will be edible.”

Arlene watches her granny’s show of bad table manners in open-mouthed shock. While she gobbles her meal, she focuses her attention on Cass, speaking with her mouth full, food spraying.

“Say it, don’t spray it,” mutters Arlene under her breath.

“Huh?”

“Nothing Gran.”

“You bought me, Cassie, dear, and now I’m yours.”

A squeal of giggles issues forth.

“I’m actually looking forward to being with you. Cassie, me gal. I have special needs. Comes with old age, you know, when I wee the bed, you have to change the bedding at once otherwise the smell, you know…?”

Ella squeals in disgust, “Ooh! Sounds like my late gramps. I hated it when mom made me clean up after him when she was too busy.”

“You shut up! And Cassie, my tummy sometimes gives me trouble and I can’t make it to the lavatory on time. She of the late gramps story’ll tell you about that! It’s then I’ll need your tenderest ministrations, love. You’ll get used to the smell.”
Arlene mutters darkly, “I don’t believe what I’m hearing.” Then she shouts wildly, “Gran! STOP IT!”

Gran ignores her. “Cassie dear, have you made my bed yet? Have you packed my things? GO! Get to it!”

Then Gran labourously gets to her feet making a big show of getting up with moans and groans and grunts as if it is extremely painful to stand. “I’m off to the lavatory.” She leaves the room.

Suddenly there’s a stir in the doorway. A bemused Cass and Arlene tip-toe in. “Be very quiet, everyone. Listen, what do you hear?” Arlene asks.

Terrence squeaks: “Snoring?”

Di looks quizzically at Arlene. “Who’s snoring?”


Cass beams broadly. “Shh... Please don’t wake her. She’s sound asleep on Arlene’s bed. Why don’t we all leave now?”

They hastily leave and Arlene waves them off and shuts the door. When she turns around, Gran is standing right behind her, arms outstretched. In the lispy babyish tone used for toddlers she asks, “Do you still love your g’anny, den?”

Arlene bursts into tears and they hug tightly.
Uthando Lunghulule

Faith Mkhize Sinethemba


Wathula umzuzwana edunga amathe ngomgagalazo waqhubeka wathi emuzini wafika zibugaya zibuthela. Izintombi sakwa Mkhize zigewele umuzi. Amagama ayiziswa eqhuma okwesiphethu ebheke kuye ngobazazifuna umfowabo achanguze entombi yasendaweni. Konke zazikusho ngodli dlakalala
ngoba zazi ukuthi umakoti kanawo amankemfu. Uthi akubanga sikhathi esingakanani washintshelwa nangumyeni wakhe uqobo ngoba ikhohlisana ihlomile washo zehla zilandela ukuthi wayengukudla kwenduku engone lutho, umuntu wesifazane engakabi nalungelo. Wethula iduku abelithwele eveza udume lwengozi olabekwa umyeni wakhe. Washo ephindelela ethi mangimesabe umuntu wesilisa ngoba uyisilwane esingumathatha ngozwane, sikuntshontshe ngothando ujabulele imbozisamahlanga kanti lizothwasa inkabi iboshelwe.


Uthando Lungehlule


Kwathi langalimbe ngiphuma esikoleni lishaya amanzi egeleza phansi kwaqhamuka insizwa yakwa Ndlovu uZimele.


Uthando Lungehlule

ludwani oluwela kulo ngoba emuva kokucubungula izinyathelo zomfoka Ndlovu ngase ngimuthandile.


Uthando lungishintshe kwangathi imande ngifika kwelika Mthaniya. Unya enganginalo luyancipha mihla nemihla, imicabango yami yenzondo iyashabalala. Ngaphakathi kimi bekukhona impi yothando nomlando wothando liwudlile imhlanganiso. Izinto ziyenzeka futhi zimane ukwenzeka, ngizibonele ngawami amehlo ukuthi ushintsho luyisenzo sothandayo.

Izinto ziyenzeka futhi zimane ukwenzeka, ngizibonele ngawami amehlo ukuthi ushintsho luyisenzo sothandayo
As the train pulled into the station, its screeching halt pierced Sarah’s pounding head. She boarded the train and her heavy eyes quickly searched for a vacant seat. Finding one soon enough she settled in for the journey home. She tried to get some sleep to ease the headache but it was not easy to do with everyone sharing their stories of how their day was spent. When the train got to Sarah’s stop, she was unsure about getting off, reluctant to leave her hard seat for the twenty minute walk home.

It was already dark as Sarah made her way out of the station onto the gravel road. Her feet seemed to have got heavier during the train trip. Her walk now resembled that of a prisoner dragging a ball and chain. As she got to the bottom of the street, it came alive with activity. Children were playing outside, while their mothers prepared dinner on old paraffin burners. Unemployed men sat alongside the road watching life pass by.
“They’ve probably been sitting there the entire day,” Sarah guessed knowingly as she passed them.

She reached her shack and a small smile escaped from the corner of her lips. Home. She headed for the tatty mattress on the floor. Rest.

Sarah was woken by an odd sound. There was something moving in her shack. She lay there very still but she was not afraid. It moved again. Sarah struggled to decipher the sound. Then silence. Sarah, believing she had nothing to lose, turned around on her mattress. In the darkness of her shack, she strained to focus and then saw, lying in one corner of her shack, the most pathetic-looking creature she had ever seen. A dog, wet from the rain and cold from the wind, lay in the corner as if it had been invited in.

Sarah sighed as she brought herself to her feet. “Hamba,” she shouted. “Get out.”

The dog slowly moved its limp body and scrambled out the gap in the shack’s makeshift door.

“And stay out,” Sarah thought as she made her way back to her springy bed. She lay on her back and looked at the roof. It was taking strain from the heavy downpour.

In the darkness of her shack, she strained to focus and lying in one corner of her shack was the most pathetic-looking creature she had ever seen.
She lay there and thought about the day she came to live here. It was almost five years ago. It was on that day she vowed to herself that she would never be beaten again.

Her husband was an unemployed drunk and a complete good for nothing. She worked for the Van Stradens as a domestic worker and every week he would insist on spending her entire week’s wages on cheap homemade beer from the shebeen. What they would eat for the week was not his concern. All he cared about was maintaining his perpetual state of drunkenness.

There were times when she hid some money away in secret compartments she had sewn into her panties. But he would always beat it out of her. The beatings went on for years. Then, one Friday morning, she woke up and went to work. She wondered if she was the only person who hated Fridays and hated receiving her hard-earned money. It was on the train trip home that she came to the decision that she was not going back. She was going to leave him, taking nothing with her but the clothes on her back.

*It was on that day she vowed to herself that she would never be beaten again*
But leaving him also meant leaving the Van Stradens, or else he would know where to find her. So when the train came to its first stop, she got off and walked, all the time thinking about her plan of action. She thought about where she would live and what she would do for an income. The only certainty was that she could and would never go back. Not ever. And she never did.

Five years on and she had found new employment and built this shack using everything she could find and carry from the nearby dumpsite. She had survived the hardship that was her life but she was also dead. Dead to feelings good and bad. Dead to everything the world had to offer. Dead to her very being.

The rain eased off and the smell of mud and wet grass breezed in through the gap in the doorway. She turned over to get some sleep.

In the morning, as she left for work, she found the dismal dog sitting outside her shack. She pulled on the door tightly and, using a large piece of cardboard she found lying around, she blocked the gap in the doorway.

“That should keep it out,” Sarah thought out loud as she began her walk to the station.

The train pulled in and the monotony of Sarah’s day began. Every day and all day she catered to the whims of spoilt adolescent children. The children, though, weren’t as bad as their “never satisfied” mother. Regardless of what Sarah did, it was never to the satisfaction of Mrs
Lumley. If Sarah had the ability to care, she might have felt inadequate, but she didn’t.

The poor rich woman was obsessed with creating the perception of a perfect home, yet Sarah could see right through the facade. Sarah thought of how exhausting it must be. Sarah had pretended to have a perfect home for many years, hiding the truth from everyone she cared about. It got to the point when it was easier to sever ties with them than pretend. First she stopped going to church. When members of the church wanted to visit she made up appointments or feigned illness. Eventually they stopped trying.

Mrs Lumley was different though. She was forever entertaining and having VIP guests over for dinner. It was as though she needed to prove to everyone, including herself, that she had the perfect family. Sarah, who lived in a shack, felt more empowered than Mrs Lumley and her suburban living. Sarah was free.

After three hours of ironing, Sarah was about to fold like an accordion. Why did the bloody woman have to change her clothes three times a day? Although, the fifteen-year-old fashionista probably went through more. Sarah sighed with relief as she got to the end of the pile in the laundry basket. There was a chance she might make it home before sunset.

When Sarah arrived home, she found the pathetic dog sitting at the front of her door as though it had been waiting there all day anticipating her arrival. Upon seeing
her, the mangy creature wagged its tail to welcome her home.

“Not you again,” Sarah said directly to the animal. But the stray clearly interpreted the message differently as it ran in circles around Sarah, stopping only to investigate what was in the plastic bag Sarah was carrying. The leftover meatloaf caused the dog to salivate more than the dogs in Pavlov’s bell experiment. It was evident that the creature had not eaten in days.

Sarah tried half heartedly to shoo it away, but the poor thing persisted. Sarah, being too tired to fight off the dog, allowed it to follow her into the shack. She walked to her collapsing table and placed the plastic bag on it. The dog sat down patiently creating a spit pool with its slobbering tongue. Using the foil in which the meatloaf had come, Sarah made a plate and placed half the portion of meatloaf on it.

She carried the self-made plate carefully so as not to break it. As she gently placed it on the floor, the dog licked Sarah’s hand in gratitude. It was the first time Sarah had been shown appreciation for anything. The feeling was new and strange for her.

*The leftover meatloaf caused the dog to salivate more than the dogs in Pavlov’s bell experiment*
She sat forward on a backless chair, a treasure she had found at the dumpsite and watched the dog wolf down the meal as though it were expecting Sarah to change her mind. The tired woman then got up and found a broken plastic dish. She dunked it into the bucket of water standing in the corner of the shack. She placed the dish close to the dog and it wagged its tail gratefully as it lapped up the tepid water. The dog retreated under the table and collapsed, full and satisfied.

Sarah ate the remainder of the meatloaf. It was cold, but it didn’t matter to her. After dinner she lit a single candle and placed it on a bucket turned upside down that doubled as a bedside table. The dog was awake but still. As Sarah awkwardly got onto the low mattress, the dog came out from under the table as if to leap onto it. She smiled at the gesture. Sarah wondered about the life this dog had had if it now sought refuge with her. Did the dog run away from its abusive owner? Did it feel unloved and unwanted? Sarah was able to relate to the pitiful creature and decided that she would call her Sorrow.

When Sarah woke up in the morning she found Sorrow lying alongside the mattress. Her breathing resembled that of a sleeping baby. Sorrow was content and Sarah smiled at her innocence. As Sarah clumsily got out of bed, Sorrow stood up to greet her. She placed her paws on Sarah knees and wagged her tail happily.

“Yes, good morning to you too,” Sarah said, acknowledging the dog.
Sorrow walked Sarah all the way to the station that morning, and sat on the platform as Sarah boarded the train.

“Silly dog,” Sarah said under her breath, failing to understand why the dog would choose her. She had nothing to offer it. “If she was a smart dog, she would have chosen people like the Lumleys to take care of her.”

As Sarah went about her housework, she secretly wondered if Sorrow would be waiting for her when she got home, but she shook the thought out of her head. Why was she setting herself up for disappointment? Of course the silly dog would be out looking for its next meal. Sorrow was a loner, just like Sarah.

Sarah was not doing a good job convincing herself of this. This was most evident when she got off the train. Her walk was so brisk that if she went any faster it would have been a run. Her eyes grew large with excitement as she saw Sorrow sitting by the door of her shack, lazing in the warmth of the setting sun. When Sorrow caught sight of Sarah, she galloped towards her as though she too had spent the day questioning if she would see Sarah again. Her excitement heightened when she sniffed Sarah’s baggage and discovered that there was going to be lamb casserole for dinner.
Sarah divided the meal into equal portions and they ate their dinner together. Surprisingly, Sarah was not as tired as she usually was after a day’s work at the Lumleys.

Not completely sure what to do with this new found energy, Sarah decided to go for a walk. There was a remnant of sunlight as Sarah and Sorrow set off on their evening stroll. They walked all the way to a playground, where some boys played football.

Sorrow ran onto the field and nosed the ball around the young footballers. The children jumped up and down with excitement. The girls on the sidelines cheered Sorrow on as she made her way down the field with all the players in hot pursuit. Sarah laughed out loud at the commotion. She laughed and laughed until tears came out of her eyes.

Once Sorrow was done showing off her ball skills she ran back to Sarah. Sarah patted her on the head, partly with pride and partly with gratitude. Sarah could not remember the last time she had laughed. She thought that she had forgotten how to, but Sorrow had reminded her.

“Your dog is very clever, Aunty,” one of kids shouted from the field.

“My dog,” thought Sarah, and smiled to herself.

Sarah and Sorrow walked back to the shack in contented silence. Sarah was alive again thanks to her Sorrow.
“T!” came the voice from behind.

The voice was unmistakably older, but I knew who it was. The only person who has ever called me “T”. My love. Sybrandt. I turned around.

***

1955

I was walking along the dusty road from Griquatown to Niekerkshoop. On my way to the third farm, I saw a man who had pulled off the road to check on the sheep on the back of his bakkie. It was around midday, and the African sun was beating down on me. I walked up to him.

“Good day, Basie, I have a long way to go today. Can Basie give me a lift to the next farm on the back of Basie’s bakkie, please?”
His, what I had initially thought to be pleasant, face contorted with anger. “No man, don’t be crazy!”

I lowered my eyes. “Sorry Basie,” I said softly as I started walking off.

I thought to myself that I would never be able to deal with men treating me like the baas had just treated me. Back home in the Transkei all the boys and men had treated my mama and myself like queens. I quickly realised that men treat beautiful women better than the plain ones. On one of my first childhood trips to Queenstown, I was horrified to see how rude and dismissive many white men were towards us in the shops. To them we were less than dogs.

I started dreading our monthly outings to Queenstown. I then realised that white men owned the world, and not beautiful black women, as I had believed.

Since then I couldn’t look old ladies in the eye, because I couldn’t deal with them losing their beauty. Some of the stories in the books my mama had dutifully collected for me, suddenly took on a whole new dimension in my little mind. I was heartbroken by the story of the once beautiful Medusa who had lost her looks in such a cruel way. I was in awe of the beautiful Queen Esther who had used her looks to save her people, the Jews, from the diabolic Haman.

I quickly realised that men treated beautiful women better than the plain ones.
Immorality

My mama would comfort me in noticing my torment regarding the idiosyncrasies of feminine beauty. She said a woman is beautiful once she realises her body is merely a veil covering the goddess inside, regardless of her age or how men treat her. I still don’t get it. Maybe I’ll get it when I’m older.

After fifteen minutes of ruminating, I reached the turn-off to the third farm, Donkerskloof.

I had arrived in Griquatown a few hours earlier. An acquaintance from the Transkei, Thabang, had dropped me off on his way to Postmasburg. Once Thabang had dropped me off, I made my way straight out of town to start looking for a job. On the first two farms I had had no luck. I entered the gate of Donkerskloof and followed the gravel road leading to the farmhouse.

The farmhouse was unkempt and the lawn and shrubbery overgrown. As I was walking up the stairs, I heard a vehicle pulling up, and turned around. It was him, the rude man from earlier. My heart sank in my shoes.

“What are you doing on my property?!!!” He was livid.

“Sorry, Basie, I am looking for a job, and I didn’t realise that this is Basie’s farm…”

“Well, get off my property!!! Voetsek!!! All you people do is rape, steal and murder!!! Why would I give you a job? Voetsek!!!”
I went ice cold, numb, dead inside. No man had ever spoken to me in this way before. I didn’t feel like a woman. Not even like a human being.

And then, something *unbelievable* happened. He fainted and hit his head against a rock.

I ran over to him. He was breathing. I knelt down, put his head on my lap and lightly slapped his cheek, but nothing happened.

I ran down to the *volk*’s houses as fast as I could, and told an elderly woman who was tending to the children what had happened. She sent one of the children to the veld to call the foreman.

Within minutes, the foreman, who introduced himself as Moos, arrived and we made our way to the farmhouse as fast as we could. He told me that the *baas* suffered from low blood pressure and had fainted a few times before. When we reached the *baas* he was conscious but very weak and we had to load him in the *bakkie* together. Moos sped off to Niekerkshoop, with me on the back.

Moos was obviously highly experienced on this notoriously dangerous stretch of gravel road, because we made it safely to the little doctor’s room in Niekerkshoop.

*I knelt down, put his head on my lap and lightly slapped his cheek, but nothing happened*
I sat with Moos outside the doctor’s room to see that the baas was okay. After half an hour the *baas* emerged and I started walking off.

“You, be at my place at seven o’clock on Monday morning,” he called faintly after me.

I got a lift with Moos back to Donkerskloof and stayed with my sister, Patience, in Griquatown for the weekend.

I set out for Donkerskloof before the crack of dawn on the Monday morning.

The farmer, *Baas* Pretorius, showed me the tiny, run-down maid’s quarter, separate from the other *volk* houses, where I would be staying. Better so, because they were all coloureds of Griqua descent, and they would have had a hard time accepting a black person in their midst.

He didn’t show me what my duties were, only told me that I was forbidden to enter his study.

The house definitely needed a good spring cleaning and I set out to work.

*I went ice cold, numb, dead inside. No man had ever spoken to me in this way before. I didn’t feel like a woman. Not even like a human being*
I quickly settled into my life as Baas Pretorius’s maid. I was the silent hand that kept his house clean and his stomach full, and he was the silent hand that paid my salary. He trusted Moos to run his farm, and subsequently spent many silent hours in his study. Over time I started picking up stories from the volk about the incidents that had shaped Baas Pretorius.

His mother had been raped by a black man when he was eighteen and she committed suicide shortly afterwards. His father joined her one month later. Moos told me that on the day that I had met Baas Pretorius, he was in a foul mood because he had learnt that the man who had raped his mother, had managed to escape from jail. A few hours after his escape, he had raped an elderly woman on a farm near Kathu.

During my first winter working for Baas Pretorius, he became gravely ill with bronchitis. I became the silent hand who nursed him back to health.

As time progressed, Baas Pretorius started spending more and more time in the lounge and the kitchen, reading. I would sometimes look up and catch him staring at me. He would always look away, embarrassed.

One day over lunch, he suddenly said: “Thembela, you can eat with me at the table if you want to.”

I became Baas Pretorius’s silent eating partner. He would always thank me afterwards, “Thank you Thembela, the food was really good.”
I started seeing a side of *Baas* Pretorius that I never would have been able to imagine. He would never walk past an animal in need, and was forever rescuing injured birds. In a community notorious for ill-treating their *volk*, he paid his *volk* very well and treated them with respect.

He also fixed up my room nicely about a month or so after my arrival. After a while, he allowed me to start cleaning his study as well. I was amazed at his collection of books.

One night over dinner, I looked up at the silent man staring intently at me: "Thembela, you are beautiful."

My heart swelled with pride, and I smiled. Yet, I felt very sad for *Baas* Pretorius. Because he had felt such rage for me initially, a fire had ignited in him. When he started treating me better, the fire subsided slightly. But fire inside a person can’t ever die, only change direction.

The fire in him had simply changed direction, flared up and started consuming him. He was completely helpless.

One night, a few months later, after supper, he took my hand, and led me into his bedroom.

*I was the silent hand that kept his house clean and his stomach full, and he was the silent hand that paid my salary*
In his bedroom, in the dark, I got to really see the gentle man with the big, rough farmer’s body. Sybrandt Pretorius. Night after night I got to taste and feel and consume and be consumed by one after another piece of what was starting to take shape as a human being more beautiful then I could ever comprehend.

One night, I started talking. Like Scheherazade, I spun him in the yarn of my tales, drawing him closer and closer, yet untangling him at the same time, a knotted yarn of fear, sadness, anger and hatred. Milking the venom from him as Scheherazade had done to her prince with her tales. Me, telling stories, with my body entangled with my big, strong Sybrandt. I realised that his racist beliefs were not constructed by his own mind – they had been adopted from his family and confirmed by what had happened to his mother. That made it easier for him to change.

And then he really started talking. Pain, anger, rage, fear and then, at last, love, assuring me that I was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

Sometimes we danced, but only inside the room that demarcated the borders of our love.

This is the story of our love.

*But fire inside a person can’t ever die, it can only change direction*
Immorality

We loved one another for eight years. Then I left.

I had to.

Our love was a love confined to the dark in a room on a farm in the middle of nowhere. It was a love that would never be able to bear fruit. It was yearning to break free, but was kept captive by a simple law: The Immorality Act; a law that stated that love between a white man and a black woman was an act of immorality.

I organised a lift with a friend leaving for the Transkei and disappeared one night in the early summer of 1964.

Back in the Transkei, I quickly resumed my old life. Zolile, my first and only love before Sybrandt, was newly widowed. We resumed our relationship where we had left off. I never breathed a word about my and Sybrandt’s love. Over time Sybrandt and my love morphed into a cancer that gnawed at my being every night as I lay next to Zolile. Cruelly, it left me rested and intact every morning, waiting to feed off me the following night again.

My years with Zolile were my sepia years. I loved him, but it was a safe, lukewarm love. We were happy, had three handsome, successful sons and two equally beautiful and successful daughters. But still, it was nothing like the life I had with Sybrandt: A life far across the borders of some crazy conventions and draconian rules – a life lived in full colour. Our love was unscarred by the tests of reality; untainted.
I was forever torn, never knowing whether I had made the right decision. In 1985, I realised that I had made the wrong decision. PW Botha, known as Die Groot Krokodil, scrapped the Immorality act. Just like that. If only I had waited. The walls of Sybrand and my bedroom were solid. It surely could have contained our love for another twenty-two years. And so what if the love was crippled after not being able to walk outside for two decades? Surely we would have been able to nurse it back to health?

But back then, even with everything the freedom fighters were doing, there had been no end in sight for us on the ground.

If only I had known.

If only I had known.

For a few months the cancer that ate at me at night actually left me exhausted and depressed during the day. Strangely, nobody noticed that something was amiss. Then, out of the blue, after about nine months, I started feeling better during the day again.

And, my mama had been right all along. As I grew older, I became more beautiful. It was as if my body and my face became more and more of a sheer veil, and I started shining through: a beautiful woman who had gracefully weathered the storms of life.

With time, even the veil started crumpling, and I was left raw. Raw, but beautiful.
One day I woke up and found that Zolile had passed away in the night.

Then one day Patience told me Sybrandt never got married. I cried for him.

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Busiswe, my second daughter, and I pulled up in front of Fountain Palms retirement village in Bloemfontein. I was excited about the adventure that lay ahead. I had never wanted to be a burden to my children and stand in the way of them living their lives to the fullest. I looked forward to lazy afternoons, playing cards and being with friends in the winter of their pilgrimage.

And that is where Sybrandt and myself found one another again.

Yes, after the initial joy, the resentment crept in. Why did I leave, and why without even saying goodbye? I patiently explained to him, over and over; told him that it was the biggest mistake of my life. Eventually he understood, and we started loving one another all over again.

It was as if my body and my face became more and more of a sheer veil, and I started shining through: a beautiful woman who had gracefully weathered the storms of life...
He couldn’t stop telling me how much more beautiful I had become. We had to keep telling ourselves that we were not dreaming and that we really had, at last, the opportunity to experience the joys of a free love; going to coffee shops, the movies, for walks and making love wherever we could find a private spot – without fear of prosecution.

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1 September 2008

Sybrandt and Thembela took their love with them when they passed in their sleep last night.
As a young child, adolescent and woman, Letitia did not know what love meant until she met this beautiful gay man called David, who loved her unconditionally.

Letitia pretty much raised herself as both her parents worked full time. She had no friends and battled for most of her life to build relationships with others. She was repeatedly abused between the ages of 5 and 10, in a sexual manner, by a close friend of the family. Although there was no penetration, the emotional scars that weighed down heavily on her by hiding this secret deep within her soul were carried through to her late thirties.

After her abuser lost interest in her, Letitia was very alone. She developed a self-defense mechanism within her and she kept everybody at a fair distance. She did not let anybody get too close to her for fear of them leaving her.

As a young woman, because Letitia lacked the much needed nurturing of a mother, she sorely lacked the social
development skills she so much needed, and as a result, experienced severe problems with people through her school life, work life and relationships. She battled with people in authority, and they battled with her.

Letitia was a late bloomer. She got married at 21 for all the wrong reasons. She could not distinguish the difference between love and sex. To her, love was sex. Her mother had never spoken to her about the subject of love or sex. Not wanting or planning to have children, she was not at all pleased when she conceived and gave birth to a little girl. Her ex-husband had cheated on her with another woman and this led to divorce at 25, when her little girl was only 3 years old.

After the divorce, Letitia bought a house for her and her daughter. She raised her daughter on her own, but it was an uphill battle because, since she knew no love, she could show no love. The only thing Letitia understood was discipline. She learnt from her experiences to keep people at a distance, and she taught her daughter to do the same.

Little did she realise that no man is an island. People need people, but her early experience with people in life taught her not to trust anybody. In fact, she did not even trust her mother. Later in life she realised that she did not like her mother very much.

She learnt from her experiences to keep people at a distance and she taught her daughter to do the same.
She worked in various companies, first as an administrator, then as a secretary, then as a business development manager, but never stayed for more than 3 years in any one position. Although she was efficient, she battled with authority. She battled even more with the lack of values in businesses that were making huge amounts of money from the poorest of the poor. Although very committed to whatever she did, she lacked patience and tolerance and eventually quit to find a new challenge.

Life after divorce was particularly difficult for Letitia. She constantly searched for love in all the wrong places. Since she did not know what love was, she confused love with sex. She became exceedingly promiscuous and used sex as a weapon against any man she fancied. However, she soon lost interest in the men that she dragged into her bed. The single men seemed to attach themselves to her, but she did not commit to any of them. She then decided that perhaps married men made better prospects as they were committed to their families. She could enjoy the sex with them without the commitment and added bother of getting rid of them when she tired of them.

She was continuously ducking and diving wives who wanted to kill her because she was messing with their husbands, but for Letitia, this added to the excitement. She again conceived from one such affair and was devastated. She could not imagine raising another child, so she went for an illegal back-street abortion.

She soon broke off the affair by involving another man and playing the two off against each other. As soon as
the married man left her, she broke off the affair with the single man. It was tricky, but exciting. Through all of these years, Letitia also developed a dependency on alcohol and the sexual game became a game of power. She was like a scavenger, sourcing good-looking men from night clubs and pubs, dragging them home, sexing them up, and dumping them.

For about three years thereafter, she continued to play the same sex game of cat and mouse, but she took care not to invite anybody home until one day she met someone. She loved dancing and met a man who shared this interest. They became involved sexually, but he had his home and she had hers. He was married, but his family was in Europe, so he managed to hide this secret from her very well. They saw each other only when each one wanted to. It was convenient, and it was not stifling. As time went by, she wanted more, but he did not want any commitment.

After 3 years, he dropped the bombshell; his daughter and family in Europe needed him. He left her to go back to his family in 1997, when she was 32 years old. She was devastated. She wanted to travel to Europe with him to live with him. He was Roman Catholic and did not believe in divorce. Once again, she had trusted the wrong person. She was devastated.

Immediately after he left, she again sought satisfaction through promiscuity. After a while, she got tired of the game, and decided that she wanted her own dedicated boyfriend. Of course, since she was dependent on alcohol, she managed to attract men who had a similar interest. She
found a man whom she had known for about 10 years. He was practically living out of his motor vehicle and she invited him into her home. Eight months later, she kicked him out. She went on a rampage to find another dedicated boyfriend. She found him in a shebeen in Kensington and dragged him home, and he became her boyfriend. Eight months later, he disappeared. He had found somebody else, knocked her up, and was going to marry her.

In the meantime, David had moved in with his cousin across the road. He was very friendly, but because Letitia did not trust friendly, she avoided him at all costs. One day in November 2003, her house was burgled when she was on assignment at an insurance company. David called her to tell her what had happened and through doing so, he gained access to her.

He became a regular visitor in her home and in her life. David, being gay, had absolutely no sexual interest in Letitia. However, he showed her, for the very first time, what love meant. Being as impatient and intolerant as she was, Letitia was often very nasty towards David, but he had so much humility. He never took offense and he always came back for more.

He showed her, for the very first time, what love meant
Having been dumped by her last boyfriend, David was the only one she could turn to for emotional support. He did his job extremely well. He encouraged Letitia to accompany him to church. Although she was raised in the church, she hated the church. She was forced to go to church as a child and she hated it because of that. Her mother had died when she was 30 years old but she realised how much she hated her mother and anything that reminded her of her mother, even church.

David was very encouraging, and she found herself opening up to him. For the first time in her life, at the age of 39, she told him her story of the abuse by her neighbour. After doing that, she felt as though a huge rock had been lifted off her heart. The more she spoke to David, the more she realised that the abuse by her neighbour was petty compared to the neglect by her mother.

She went to church with David, but did not enjoy the order of service in the Anglican Church. It was a start. She wanted to go to church and she mentioned it to a colleague, who invited her to the English service of the NG Church. The first night she was there, she cried throughout the service. The realisation of how lost she was devastated her.

David was the only one she could turn to for emotional support.
She had been wandering through life as the Israelites had wandered through the desert for 40 years. Although there were many tears, something had touched her very deeply and she wanted to go back. This was Letitia’s first breakdown and show of emotion. For the first time, she felt strengthened by it instead of weakened.

David died of a stroke shortly after she started going to church, but she was strengthened in the memory of his kindness and humility. The collision with David was a step in the right direction for Letitia. She continued to go to church, and the lessons that she learnt were invaluable. Her anger, pride and lust ebbed away with every visit.

One Sunday, as she listened to the pastor’s sermon on honouring thy parents, Letitia again broke down emotionally, because of the guilt that she felt at hating her mother, who had died more than 10 years ago. She had not realised how much pain that hatred had caused her over the years. All that had been said about her was true, even though she had not realised it before. She was rebellious towards her mother, and the sexual promiscuity and alcohol were vices her mother detested most.

*She had been wandering through life as the Israelites had wandered through the desert for 40 years*
Breaking the Silence

Her mother had never said anything encouraging to her. In her mind, her mother had continuously tried to break her spirit. The alcohol abuse and sexual promiscuity served as a weapon against her mother. She realised this and resolved that since her mother was gone, there was no need to fight this battle anymore. This, of course, was much easier said than done.

Letitia quit her last job as a business development manager. She decided to go on her own as an insurance broker, but this did not work very well. Since then, she tried sales, business support, writing a book about her life, real estate. Nothing seemed to be working too well for her in business.

All was not lost. In her “idle” time, she worked, through empowering herself spiritually, to learn how to forgive her mother for the atrocities committed against her. She worked tirelessly at understanding her purpose in life.

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Letitia’s daughter, now 23 years old with 3 daughters, and she have the most wonderful mother/daughter relationship any mother could hope for. Unfortunately, the love she learnt so late in her life came too late for Letitia to save her daughter from making the mistakes she made. Her daughter’s husband left her for another woman.

Through her experience, Letitia has learnt much, but the greatest of this is that love can heal anything. Through
love comes patience, tolerance, humility, kindness and forgiveness.

Letitia has not had any sexual contact with anybody for 5 years. Her battle with alcohol is ongoing, but she is determined to win the battle against the self-inflicted slavery.

Through her battles, she managed to lose her house but she has gained much more wealth than material wealth. She has learnt what love is, gained her self-respect and her spiritual growth is ongoing. Instead of being depressed about the future, she patiently awaits her maker to send her to the place where she is best able to serve.

Too many young women today lose their children because they do not know love and they do not know how to show love. She has realised this and she lavishes her daughter, granddaughters and everybody she comes into contact with, with the gift of love. When you show love, you receive love.

Letitia has a picture of David in her living room, a daily reminder of her journey and how far she has come because of the true love of one gay man. Every day, she thanks God for sending David to help her get her life back on track when everything seemed to be falling apart.

Through love comes patience, tolerance, humility, kindness and forgiveness.
Breaking the Silence

Through her experiences, she has learnt that the most important gift you can give anybody, is just to love them, unconditionally. The purpose of life is to sacrifice yourself to save another. The only way to do this is through unselfish, unconditional love. Where love lives, everything is possible.

Where there is love, there is God. Where there is God, there is no fear. Although she does not know what the future holds, she knows who holds the future.
Dear You

I have decided to write a letter to you. I feel, I think, I want you to know what you began that day. I should probably write it to you in our shared mother tongue but I do not want to offend our ancestors. You see, writing it in a foreign language allows the reality to remain removed from who we are. Even in my memory it remains foreign, elusive. This is not necessarily good, I know that.

Grey. That was the colour of the sky that day. I remember that. Looking out at the world as everything became smaller until all that was left was this. The memory, the experience folded into a tiny clot and tucked away in the recesses of the mind. Grey, black and white saw me through the years, or perhaps I saw the years through them. Either way, everything would find meaning in those colours or else there was no room for it, people, experiences, places.
My name is Lulu, but you probably remember. We were not strangers you and I. In fact, you probably remember how I looked up to you, admired you. Depending on who you have since become, you may or may not remember the events of that day. They have consumed me, moulded me. I do not know myself outside of them.

Well, now I am depressed. I know that you may not understand this. I have been mocked for it. I have been told to pull myself together and get on with life. I have been told I just want attention. That I’m full of excuses. I believe that. I am confused. But I want to tell you my story. You need not listen. You may walk away while I explain. You may choose not to believe it. You may even throw this letter away before finishing it. I do not know what this will achieve. But I want to tell you my story and tell it I will.

I lie in bed some nights, thinking, crying, thinking. I wander where you are. Do you remember? Do you remember me? What are you doing? Do you ever think of what happened, what you did, what you gave and took away? Some questions are simple: why didn’t you stop? Some are more difficult because I couldn’t bear to hear the answer: why did you do it? Someone died that day and someone else was born. A watershed moment. In a sense even within you, this change probably occurred, right? Children died and pain gave way to bitterness trapped in maligned bodies.

Grey, black and white saw me through the years, or perhaps I saw the years through them
So many questions constantly take form in my mind. Rhetorical, of course. Your answers can never give me closure. Some shallow: Do you take really long baths as often as I do? Do you feel the need to wash it all away? Do you think it’s written on your forehead so that everyone knows and so hang your head? Do you cry? Have you found love … did it accept you? Do you mourn our deaths? Does it define you? Does it sum up your existence, your identity? Is it all there in you? I do not expect answers.

I learnt early on that this meant ugliness and irreparable damage and made one disgusting and worthless. So I lied. Do not judge me. I learnt survival and self-preservation from you. I wanted innocence, I wanted approval, praise, acceptance, affirmation, validation. I wanted it all. Neither you nor I wanted the truth. I played, I sang, I worked. People asked how I was and before I could answer they had walked away. I learnt that they did not want to know. So I did not tell. Some said I was pretty, but I knew that was a lie. See, lies and truth overlapped in my mind.

I grew up surrounded by death, its smell, its imminence, its presence. My protector died before I could ask him where he was that day. Everything I love dies. That’s the conclusion I came to. Those living were only a step away from death, disease ravaging their bodies and minds leaving little time and patience for trivial questions such as how are you? It was handed to me as my inheritance. An exit such as you would find in any building written in bright red and always inviting when danger overwhelms.
It was an option. I had already faced the issue of my own mortality that day. I have to face it even now. On days when life overwhelms me, all I can do is hide until the moment passes. When I speak of life overwhelming me, I do not mean global warming, wars, earthquakes. No, I mean waking up and getting out of bed. I mean putting shoes on. I need a reason to do all that and most times I struggle to find one. It is then that I toy with the idea, you know, thinking on the futility of life, the pointlessness of my existence.

Recently someone dear to me was diagnosed with a life-threatening disease. I felt pity for them. Pity is a kind of love but I couldn’t bring myself to offer the kind of comfort and concern that was fitting. Besides, I often wonder if this person knows what you did to me. I then wonder if others’ silences are for me or themselves. This of course makes me come across as callous and cold but I cannot invest like that anymore. I know the inevitable outcome.

I wanted innocence, I wanted approval, praise, acceptance, affirmation, validation. I wanted it all. Neither you nor I wanted the truth.
Yes I was clothed, fed, educated. They gave me religion and for a while I could get lost in that. Food became my biggest ally, loyal as ever. It provided insulation and armour. Who is pretty now, I laughed from behind my protective covering. The relationship continued, fuelled by the absent images everywhere. Those close to me shot up the social ladders while I sat on the bottom rung, reading and wondering. I became part of the background. You should know that when you’re that young being the top student is not nearly as important as being attractive.

My teenage years were unhappy and were a blur in ways that mattered. I wore black a lot. I wore grey and navy and brown. Most of my clothes were hand-me-downs from my much older sisters and fit. One thing I learnt though is to work with what I had and that was a brain, even though sometimes that betrayed me. Oh how I wanted to wear clothes in the junior department and not the women’s. I wanted the bags. I didn’t want to be mistaken for a whale and you should know people say things like that, yes, to your face. I wanted to be able to jump but I didn’t want to risk the tremor when I hit the ground. I just wanted to be young, carefree.

I wanted so badly to be liked and pursued. Ironically I didn’t want a relationship. I didn’t want to be vulnerable and committed or to have someone so close to me that they could smell you. I couldn’t stand to be touched. No I couldn’t handle the possibility of rejection on that basis. Well, I did not have to worry about that. I tried to find myself in glossy pages and motion pictures but I was not there and the absence was laughing back. So I attacked.
Breaking the Silence

My arsenal was full, my motivation the promises of freedom. Thus began a very long war and, like most, futile, expensive and doing more harm than good. The battles I won gave me short-lived victories which were never as sweet as I had been led to believe.

I honestly had believed that one box contained the answers to all my problems. I would look and feel great. Those who left would come back. Those who looked away in disgust or worse, looked right through me, would now be staring longingly as I strutted away. My Brazilian hair blowing in the wind as I waved my French tips ever so flirtatiously. Of course all this change had to be bought.

I would find confidence, self-esteem, identity, a career, companionship, all wrapped up in one (very expensive) box. I did not. This did not deter me. I bought another box, and another bottle, some magic drops and miracle pills. The fluctuation and oscillation of weight and emotions, the weight of emotions and the emotions about my weight became an obsession. Did you ever think of what you began?

Then one day you realise that you’re surrounded by some very mean and hurtful people and you wonder how that happened.
Yes of course I had friends, some real, some imagined, who were the better friendships. Some lasted longer than others. When you’re not great friends with yourself, people catch on and start treating you the way you treat yourself. Then one day you realise that you’re surrounded by some very mean and hurtful people and you wonder how that happened. Also, it is hard to start in the middle, though, as you may well imagine, I could not quite fit you into the conversation. So intimacy remained a myth and an illusion to me. I was really starting to believe it was a lie spun by the same person that made our paths cross. Maybe if it was real, it certainly was not for the likes of me. I mean, who actually has the patience to peel through the layers, see the ugly and still hold its hand?

So in the same bed I toss and turn trying to find answers to questions I will not ask, I lie still and remember. I hurl my anger at the sky, at fate, at faith. Then I met a sister and another sister who knew and understood. We cried, we listened and we shared. I walked away with a feeling I could not explain. I walked away with my head held high. They are the reason I am writing to you, acknowledging your existence.

My suppressed anger, pain, hurt, shame, all of it, were poisoning my insides. Well, I found the antidote. Love. An ancient remedy that restores the soul. I will not lie and tell you it happened overnight. It is still happening
even now. It is still happening even now. Every morning, I take a drop and rub some on the body that I now love and appreciate. I laugh with me, no longer at me. I allow meaningful relationships to flourish and shallow ones to diminish. I know my worth and refuse to give any part of me away, this is all new to me. You did not take everything.

I discovered colours. Oh I love colours. The pinks and the purples and the reds oh yes, the reds, the yellows. Sometimes I feel like a child. I took off my mourning clothes and danced for my second chance. I was tired of waiting, wishing, hoping. I wanted to live, right now, in this moment. It was mine. Nothing could remain the same. I found me in love.

I found myself in stories and words. I found beauty in the faces I pass every day that may never make it onto front pages. I saw beauty in the mirror. I stood naked and looked at everything I had learnt to loathe. I saw beauty in every curve, spot and dimple. And I fell in love. I apologised for the decades’ long desecration. I loved the kinky hair with a life of its own.
I loved the scars. Yes I loved the face, the chest, the flab and the rolls. I loved it all. I loved my spirit that survived it all. I loved the soul that was coming to life.

I just thought you should know.

Lulu

P.S. I forgive you
PERSONAL ESSAYS
The room spins back into focus, my eyes adjust to the darkness and I try to move. An intense pain shoots through my whole body. I cannot move.

“Oh God! Oh God!” I pray silently. “Don’t let anything be broken.”

I reach out to grab hold of a kitchen chair to try and stand up and my arm will not move. I try with my other hand and with the Lord’s Prayer on my lips I pull myself up. I crumble, I fall. I will not just lie here, and as stubborn as I am I try once more. The chair scrapes across the floor and I grab hold of it once more and try to stand up on one foot as I cannot straighten my other leg.


My question is soon answered as he storms in and unceremoniously with the viciousness of a lion tearing

Tears in My Coffee

by Mayshree Bhim (Ajanabi)
into his prey he yanks me by my hair and roughly pulls me up off the ground. I scream in pain.

“You bitch!” he screams. “Now you want to try and attract attention. You always make me do this.”

Holding me with one hand, he punches me full in the face and flings me across the room. I land in a crumpled heap. He bends down, grabs me by the throat and tries to strangle me.

“I’ll kill you, whore!” he screams. “You are nothing, hear me. You’re nothing without me.”

“Oh God,” I think, “please don’t let me die.”

I look at him and fix him with a defiance belying my weak state of body and mind. He stares back, gets up and with a grunt of disgust kicks me full in my stomach. I cannot even curl up because my body is so racked with pain that I cannot distinguish where it begins or ends. He looks at me, spits onto my face and repeats “you not worth it” and storms out.

I look at him and fix him with a defiance belying my weak state of body and mind. He stares back, gets up and with a grunt of disgust kicks me full in my stomach.
I drag myself across the kitchen floor to the bathroom. “Thank God this outbuilding is so small,” I think as I reach the bathroom and with the help of the sturdy sink pull myself up, sit on the toilet and look at myself in the mirror. My face is swollen and my eyes are mere slits with different hues of blue, black and red. There is blood all over me. I cannot open my mouth properly to spit out the blood. My head feels the size of a watermelon and I seem to have lost a tooth. Bitter bile rises in my throat as I vomit and pass out.

Here and now
I sit in my most favourite spot in the world, my back garden, watching the birds feed greedily from the birdfeeder while the butterflies dance and gaily move between my full rose bushes. I feel a tweak of jealousy for those who have the ability to paint this onto canvas and marvel at how peaceful and soothing nature can be to the soul. My best friends and I are meeting this morning at my home to discuss the formal launch of a social networking initiative which has been one of my dreams for a long time: Girlfriend Network. Tumi, as always, has arrived first as punctuality is her forte and she leans across the table and squeezes my hand. “Why now?” she asks, responding to my revelation that I am going to write a book called Tears in my Coffee.

I sit in my most favourite spot in the world, my back garden, watching the birds feed greedily from the birdfeeder
“It’s time I shared this with the hope that it will change someone’s life,” I say. “I saw this advertisement in the paper calling for women to write their stories or poems down and I thought ‘Why not?’ After all, one needs to be true to oneself and even though it may sound clichéd, as life often is, one person can make a difference.

“You know I believe that God speaks to us in signs and I saw this as a sign for the culmination of all that I have worked for. I realised that there are so many of us in this world that have cried bitter tears and yet like me have put on a brave face to the rest of the world.

“You know that it has always been at the back of my mind to write a series on some of these women so that we may inspire others to overcome their trials and tribulations. I can never do this if I cannot write about my own experiences, for how do I get others to share their souls with the world if I cannot share mine?

“How many tears in her coffee do you think Winnie Mandela had while she raised a family and continued with the struggle, or the late great Miriam Makeba or even you? There is strength in us women that can never be quantified.”
Always cautious, which I guess comes with the territory of being involved in politics, Tumi warns me, “That’s all well and good but ask their permission first; and you have mine.”

Tumi has worked hard and brought up two daughters by herself while taking care of her parents and younger siblings, yet this has just made her stronger. In a world of politics dominated by men she has made a respectful name for herself. Tears flood her eyes as she says, “You should write. I see you still don’t know how to use the computer,” she teases, trying to lighten the mood but fails miserably all choked up with emotion.

“You know me,” I reply, also trying to change the subject. “I still believe that when you write what your heart and mind feel, it flows through your soul and guides your hand.”

“I know, I know,” she laughs, “and you still write personal letters by hand because email is so impersonal.”

We look at each other and realise that we are not fooling anyone with our feeble attempts at jocularity. In a forced attempt at brightness I say, “Remember now, no more tears with our morning coffee, we are done with that. Life is what we want it to be.”

She responds aiding me in our attempt to change the sombre mood. “Yeah right, I’ve heard that from you a thousand times and I guess now you’ll add your other famous line”.

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“That’s right. The only bitterness I want to taste in the morning is that of coffee, not that which brought the tears,” I say in a dramatic way, imitating a bad actor.

She shakes her head at my silliness and says jovially, “You’re a jackass.”

I am reminded of this day and conversation as I sit far away from my beloved Africa and write my story the night before it is due. I have been working non-stop for the last two weeks on a personal project and my children ask, “Why now mom?” Their concern stems from their love for me and the fact that I am too tired and, as my son cheerily points out, “Mom you are too old to pull an all-nighter”. There is no need for them to read it for they never need to know the pain although they have been my friends for many years.

I grew up in a poor township that was racially divided by a stupid apartheid rule that tried for years to destroy our identities along with our spirit. Boy did they fail. It seems that the more stringent their laws of division were with incomprehensible laws like segregated living areas, segregated shopping areas, no inter-racial marriages, segregated benches and even segregated toilets, the more our spirit of unity and strength grew. Life was difficult and money was always short so it was common practice that after high school the girls got married so as to transfer the responsibility of their parents to their husbands.

There was no hope of tertiary schooling as this was reserved for the boys and was justified by the fact that
they would have families of their own to support. So at sixteen, having finished schooling early, I was married to an abuser. He did not need a valid excuse to raise his fists to me. The trigger could range from me not having cooked his meat properly to him feeling threatened by any other man looking at me. The fact that I was a vegetarian and cooking meat was difficult for me was no excuse and looking good was a ploy by me to get men to look at me. These were his reasons to beat some sense into me. Now the fact that I had a burning desire to study and change the world and was not prepared to be just his wife seemed to have provided him and his family with the perfect excuse to abuse me.

Back then I was too naïve and we did not have any real legal support system so abuse was commonplace. A wife, according to my culture, tolerated all of this as it was her place to do so and divorce was taboo. Well, I was having none of that – I wanted a divorce and I was going to university. This led to yet another fight which left me with a broken jaw, torn knee ligaments, broken teeth, a ruptured ear drum and numerous other injuries throughout my body.

I realised that there are so many of us in this world that have cried bitter tears and yet like me have put on a brave face to the rest of the world.
After he stormed out, leaving me in my broken state on the floor, soaked in my blood, I never wanted him back, even though he tried. I was branded a whore and he a hero for trying to come back. My parents could not take the shame and offered to ship me out to hide the truth. Having refused their offer, they disowned me. At all of seventeen, I had no family and nowhere to go and I had not even healed from my injuries.

A neighbourhood boy who liked me but could never have approached me due to the fact that he was of a different faith, and the conservative nature of my family, offered me a place to stay. Horror of horrors, word spread like wildfire. I most certainly was a slut – I just proved it by staying with his sister and her husband. I can laugh about it now – but there was no humour back then – at the irony that the only man I had been intimate with was my husband and here I was branded a slut.

After some time my mother offered to pay for my tuition as they slowly came around. To protect my virtue, so to speak, my neighbourhood friend offered that we be married and said that I could study. I mistook his kindness for eternal love and married the fool. He was foolish enough to behave like a teenager racing cars and bikes and cavorting with like-minded women. Needless to say, our marriage succumbed. It was not the seven-year itch, although this was how long we were together.
I walked away with two beautiful daughters whom I used to take to university with me later on in life when I picked up the pieces of my tattered education and who today are soon to be graduates themselves, an accolade I do not yet have.

Being very passionate and a political person in the eighties was not an advisable combination or conducive for good grades. At university, I challenged the old restricting regime that was in place, one of them being that no non-white could enter the Rag contest. “Why?” I asked, and entered. I got the title of First Princess as it was explained to me that I wasn’t white so I could not hold the title. “Duh,” as my teenager would say.

The contest was huge back then as the winner was the natural runner-up in the Miss South Africa pageant. My white friends at university were supportive but there were so few of them back then that they could not challenge the system. I always think that come post-1994 so many whites, it seems, have come out of the racial closet to proclaim such open-mindedness to black people that I wonder why we even had apartheid. Some of them who were openly racist have had such amazing changes of heart, it’s no wonder that we are infamously known when it comes to heart transplants. A case in point is that of the official hairdressers of the Rag contest who refused to touch my hair as it was beneath them and used gloves which hampered their expert skills as stylists. Today these very individuals have the largest clientele of people of my descent. I guess the power of money supercedes racial boundaries.
On the Monday after the contest I got a huge bouquet of flowers and a note thanking me for having the courage to storm the regime and for winning, from the president of the Black Sash Movement. The flowers were delivered to the campus, which resulted in me being called to the rector’s office. The disapproving stare he gave me when he handed me the note, which he had already opened and read, was no different to the one he gave me when he called me back a few days later and advised me that I should deregister. Hell no – I was going nowhere.

“No sir,” I respectfully replied, “you will have to kick me out.” Life, let’s just say, became quite interesting after that. I never got my degree though, but I sure did get an education that has served me well.

Later on in life I married again, for you see, as I explained to my mom, I believe in love, I am a romantic at heart. “You are just stupid,” she responds with a bitterness she has nurtured over many years of being in a failed relationship herself. She, however, carried her woes as a mantle of martyrdom for she stayed “for the sake of her children”.

“Unlike you girls that run at the first sign of trouble,” she used to chastise me. I used to resent her for this until I realised what immense strength it took her to stay. My husband was a good and kind man but one who could easily love me as well as any other women who took his fancy. That did not sit well with me and after my son was born and was only three I moved with my kids. He did not take the rejection well and totally removed himself from
our lives and moved on to a new relationship, leaving no room for his son.

It was hard bringing up three kids with no financial support from their fathers but I would never change it for the world. Ah! The many roles I had to play: that of father, mother, friend, disciplinarian, career women and even their sounding-board when life became too difficult for them. God knows it was hard. We moved a lot and money was always in demand. Love, however, flowed between us with the strength of a flooded river.

Women are like those hard African diamonds that my wonderful land produces. We have many facets to us and each facet and cut life inflicts on us goes on to add to the brilliance and quality of who we are. I became a television producer and journalist with no formal training and also had the opportunity of interviewing DRC President Joseph Kabila. I have always had a deep respect for the earth and won an award for being environmental broadcaster of the year for a radio talk show I did. I am nobody famous, just an ordinary woman who loves and believes in herself and all that she is. It is the love that I have for myself and the love that God has given me through my children that I have survived. I have taken strength from this love for I believe that God loved me enough to give me a life, and no mere mortal is going to take that away from me. I will start a revolution, one born out of love and empowered by love.

*We moved a lot and money was always in demand. Love, however, flowed between us with the strength of a flooded river*
The Girlfriend Network is my revolution, started with the prayer and hope that never again will women have to feel alone. The vision is that women, no matter what their position in life, will network and help each other out in any circumstance. Whether a sister is looking for a job or a shoulder to cry on she has help close at hand, there will be a list of safe houses and halfway houses for women to go to when they are abused or destitute. Girlfriends that have legal expertise can help arrange interdicts and ensure monthly child support. Never again will a woman who has been kicked out or abused have to stay with her abuser because she has nowhere to go. She will never feel that she is nothing or that she has no one because she has a Girlfriend out there who will help.

I am hoping to start a lobby via this network to persuade a more stringent regime on child support and maintenance. I am so fed up with the fact that a man can be blacklisted for not paying his clothing account but get away with not paying for his own flesh and blood. Countless court appearances to try to get support and watching men wearing designer shoes protest to clerks of court that they have no means to pay R200 maintenance for their children and then drive away in fancy cars has made me realise that we need to fight harder.

Already, by word of mouth the sisters are networking to help each other. Every time I speak of the vision a sister comes forward with an offer of help. Teachers have offered to tutor children; lawyers have offered certain parts of the day to help the women, beauty therapists have treated sisters having a bad time to a makeover to allow them to
feel good about themselves. The network, not being in competition with any other network, welcomes everyone to come on board.

The greatest thing about the Girlfriend Network is that it works on the following principles: It is powered by the spirit of Ubuntu and the concept of Simple Living and Higher Thinking and the sisters don’t Pay Back, they Pay Forward. It is a purely African concept that I would like to implement all over the continent, for we need to find our own solutions. When more of us can live with these goals in mind there will be less of us who have tears in our coffee.

There lies a story in every one of us but how many of us get the chance to share it. How many of us have the courage to open our hearts and let others in to feel our pain, share our joys. It is never a question to me, as Shakespeare says, “to be or not to be,” for in order to survive you have to be. However, whether it is worth sharing is the question which you decide.

The Girlfriend Network is my revolution, started with the prayer and hope that never again will women have to feel alone
Am I My Sister’s Keeper?

by Joy Lange

I, Joy Lange, am the youngest of six girls and was appointed the Director of St. Anne’s Homes, a shelter for abused women and children, almost two years ago. Prior to this, whilst working in the corporate world, I served as a voluntary board member for almost a decade.

I grew up in Bridgetown, on the Cape Flats. My dad was an assistant mechanic at Tramways Bus Services (now Golden Arrows) and my mom was a domestic worker until she married my dad in 1950. They shared forty-six years of marriage until my dad passed away in 1996. We were blessed to have had my mom with us until January 2009. Raising seven children during this time must have been a difficult task.

My mother started the first netball team in the community as well as the first Sunday school. Furthermore, my mom became the chairperson of the church Sunday school committee and would create innovative ways and work tirelessly to raise funds to ensure that the entire Sunday
school would be able to have a fun day and treat at the beach every December. In 1984, when I was 11 years old, my mom started arranging annual bus tours which allowed us to visit Kimberley, Johannesburg, Swaziland, Durban and Port Elizabeth.

I remember how this had an impact on my schooling as I would often be the only one who had visited and could talk about my experience at places like the “Kimberley Big Hole”. Women working in factories would save their money on a monthly basis through my mother to ensure that at the end of each year, they would be able to take their families on this bus tour that would visit all the major cities in South Africa. My mom made sure that she booked all the then Holiday Inns for our accommodation, which made us feel like kings and queens. All of this happened during the apartheid years when the masses were oppressed and going to the beach was often the highlight of the year for many. My mother’s dedication, compassion and commitment to humanity were acts of love that, I believe, transcended into the then future generation: us.

All of this happened during the apartheid years when the masses were oppressed and going to the beach was often the highlight of the year for many
Both my parents were well respected and my mother’s leadership and sisterhood were displayed by assisting and supporting other women in the community who often came to our house for food, guidance or even refuge as domestic violence was rife then. The amazing part was that the abusive partner sometimes knew that his wife was “hiding” at our house, but they had so much respect for my mother that they would not even dream of coming to get her.

The legacy that my parents, Frederick and Francis Herman, left behind for their children is so evident today as I sit back and watch in awe how we as siblings love and support each other. It is also starting to flow into our next generation of 19 grandchildren and 6 great grandchildren as I witness how they interact with each other and their immediate environments.

Fifty years ago already, my parents opened their hearts by adopting a three month old baby boy who today remains our beloved brother with whom we celebrate his 50th birthday in March 2011.

Today I view my current role as an extension of my mom’s legacy as she did so much for the community and mankind. My parents taught us that the world does not owe us anything and that we owe the world everything.

*They speak about how blessed they are to be able to make a meaningful difference in someone else’s life*
This, I believe, was the essence and power that transformed us in ways that not even we as siblings could have imagined. A revolutionary act indeed!

Since my appointment, I have had a circle of women, in this case my sisters, rally around me in that they have come to offer their various skills, on a voluntary basis, to the women and children at the shelter. I know that this is their way of ensuring that I (as well as all the women at St. Anne’s) have all the support that we need and it is what has been handed down to them by my mother.

My eldest sister, Irene, teaches the women cooking, baking and sewing skills one day a week. My second eldest sister, Avril, organises a monthly fundraiser breakfast with her three friends at the shelter. This event is a great success and contributes to the shelter receiving more donations in kind and cash. My third eldest sister, Lorna (also a twin), is very artistic and painted the St. Anne’s Homes’ crèche walls with child-friendly characters. At the same time she also got her daughter to volunteer in the baby class. Last December, Irene and Lorna also volunteered to cook a scrumptious Christmas lunch for all the residents, their children and the staff. My sister Elizabeth and her family also came to the shelter to help in the crèche and she got her husband to fix some broken TVs.

I have heard my sisters say how they never knew that places like St. Anne’s Homes existed until they were introduced to it. They also speak about how blessed they are to be able to make a meaningful difference in someone else’s life.
Their acts of kindness and support are what make me continue when sometimes I’m at my wits’ ends. It is also a constant reminder of what our parents instilled in us that now lays the foundation for us to transfer this love and support to our children and take it into the next generation.

Many of the women in the shelter come from broken homes, and our sisterhood is an example of how family can work and build together. It serves as an inspiration for them and is evidence of the power of love – revolutionary!

This sisterhood takes me back to a verse in the bible where Cain asks the Lord, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Yes, we are each other’s keepers and this is what sisters display every time they give of themselves to others in need.

The very roots of my mother’s entire being were evident during her last days on this earth. It created an indestructible foundation amongst my siblings and for generations to come.
“Ten years of Democracy! What a celebration!” I smile at my nine-year-old son’s enthusiasm as I put down my magazine.

“Have you done your ...”

“Yes mom ... I have done my homework ...” he exclaims as he runs from the porch to go play inside.

I laugh by myself. He even knows my questions before I ask them ... I’m thinking of school ... how different they do things these days. It seems all historic reference to the “Groot Trek” and “Dingaan”, or any of the things that we were taught about South African history, have been removed from the school curriculum. The children are only taught current and relevant history, especially from the period when Mr. Mandela was released from prison, and the period in South African history where there was a thing called apartheid.
I feel the warm African sun on my face and my thoughts start to wander. Maybe one day, when my son is older, when he’ll be able to understand, I will tell him more, much more, about myself ... and about my parents. My parents ... what shall I tell him about them? I don’t think I’ll be able to tell anybody anything about who my parents really were ... I won’t even be able to say what their likes or dislikes were, or what dreams and aspirations they had! As a matter of fact, I know nothing about them ... and I certainly don’t want my child to have the same experience! The chair I’m sitting in is soft and comfortable. I close my eyes.

“Kafferboetie!” My father looks at me in anger.

“Gaan na jou kamer en bly stil. Hoekom interfere jy met alles?”

“Maar pa!”

I feel the warmth of the slap on my cheek before experiencing the pain. Shocked, and with tears streaming down my cheeks, I run from the kitchen, slamming my bedroom door behind me as I plunge onto my bed.

The next moment my dad storms into the room and starts hitting me with his belt. He does not even stop to breathe and I think he is going to kill me!

Maybe one day, when my son is older, when he’ll be able to understand, I will tell him more, much more, about myself...
“Jy slaan nie my deure toe nie, klein bliksem!”

By this time I’m not crying any more, I’m screaming!

“Stop crying or I’ll hit you again.” His face is now very red. I only scream louder.

Giving up, he storms out again, slamming the door behind him.

Oh, how I truly hate him! If I was just big and strong enough ... I would, I would kill ... no, I will kill myself! I put the pillow over my face. Maybe if I stop breathing ... 

“Wat het sy nou weer gedoen?” I hear my mother ask, her speech slurring. It is early Saturday morning; the brandy bottle’s already halfway ... 

“Gooi vir ons nog ’n dop en bly jy ook stil,” he snaps at her.

I lay very still, listening, waiting for the fight. My mother will not keep quiet, I know ... she is a very quarrelsome person and adding to that the combination of brandy and coke ... 

“Yes,” I sob quietly to myself, “ask again mom! And why don’t you answer her, you bastard? Why don’t you tell her I was only trying to make you understand that our cleaning lady is a human being just like us, and that the colour of her skin does not make her a lesser person ... and that she is not a cat or a dog who should get the
scraps from our table, that she should eat the same food we serve! Cleaning a house is hard work!” I put the pillow back over my head.

“Mom!”

I open my eyes. I must’ve dozed off.

“Yes, son?”

“Tell me more about the apartheid days. What’s the true story? Were black people really not allowed to use public toilets?”

“I’m afraid so, Mark. In those days black people were not allowed to use public toilets, or any public facility for that matter. Everywhere were notice boards saying ‘Whites only’, even on the doors of the public toilets and park benches ... as a matter of fact, I remember an incident ... but I think I should rather tell you when you’re older.”

“No, Mom! You have to tell me now, please ... please!”

“Okay then ... once, when I was small, still in primary school, my mother and I took the bus into town. I was so excited! It was my first time on a bus and going to town! As we were coming out of one of the stores, I saw a small black boy crying, holding his pants in front, as if trying to stop what was about to happen. He needed to go to the toilet, but his mother could not take him because it was illegal for them to use the public toilets. He was really sobbing his little heart out as he left a trail of pee on the
pavement, and there was nothing his mother could do ... that nearly broke my heart.”

“Come here, Mark,” I pull my sobbing son close to my heart.

“Mm ... Mom, why did it break your heart?”

“Because, my son, I was feeling very sorry for that small boy’s mom ... not being able to help her child that day must’ve made her feel terribly helpless, and what possible explanation could she give that he would’ve understood? Parents want to be able to take good care of their children, especially mothers. They want to protect them the best they can.”

And for a child, their parents are the real heroes ... I think by myself and let out a deep sigh.

“Now, go and play outside.”

I close my eyes. The sun is making me lazy and I snuggle back in the chair.

... not being able to help her child that day must’ve made her feel terribly helpless, and what possible explanation could she give that he would’ve understood?
I am outside in the street looking for my mother. It is after seven and very dark. The streetlights are not working.

“Mom!” I whisper.

No answer.

With dread I see my father through the living room window as he staggers to his bedroom, shouting something I cannot hear.

“Mom!” my call is louder, but still no answer.

“Waar is sy, waar is die hoer!” he’s now standing at the living room’s window ... Oh God no! He’s holding his gun! God, please help me to find her!

I run into the road, nearly stumbling over my parent’s mattress. My father must’ve thrown it there earlier, with nearly all my mother’s clothes and personal belongings! Everything’s scattered in the street ... I’m struggling to breathe. This is more serious than I thought! Mom and Dad came home from a braai a few hours ago, drunk and fighting as always, but I ignored it, thinking it will blow over soon enough ... after all, I’m used to the fighting ... it’s a part of my life! The neighbour opposite the street peeps out from behind his curtain, trying not to be seen, but curious to see what’s going on. He shouts to his children not to watch ... I am terribly ashamed, but I have to find my mother!

“Mamma! Mamma!” someone’s crying.
Oh no! My sisters and brothers! I run back into the house, not stopping to see what my father is doing. I gather my younger brothers and sisters and shove them all in one of the bedrooms. I lock the door from the outside ... they are screaming and banging on the door! I’m barely older than them, but somehow I feel responsible for their safety, like a self-appointed guardian. When we were a bit younger, I used to read stories to them before bedtime and I sang. They never cared if I could sing or not. I wonder at what point I stopped doing all these things. I feel all grown up. I’m able to protect them for now.

“Waar is jy hoer! Kom dat ek jou vrekskiet!” my father is really pissed-off now.

I quickly run outside again.

“Mom!” she’s still nowhere in sight.

My father’s still staggering by the living room window, his shotgun ready and aimed at something in the street ...
“Mom!” I feel someone shaking me.

“Are you sleeping?” I open my eyes. My son. How I would do anything to protect him …

“I’m not sleeping, Mark, I was just thinking.”

“Tell me more. How long was Mandela in prison and what exactly did he do wrong?”

“I thought you knew all this, Mark. Don’t you guys learn all that in school?”

“Yes … we do, but not all of it. I heard you and Vined talking about things the teacher did not tell us … maybe she doesn’t know … didn’t you and Vined grow up while all this was happening?”

“Hmm ... maybe you should rather talk to your stepfather. He knows the finer details better than me. I grew up very ignorant of what was going on around me. We did not even have a television set until I was in high school.”

“Really?” Mark is astonished. He can’t imagine someone not having a television set.

_Mandela is the perfect example of somebody that knows how to forgive and, believe me, forgiveness is the greatest gift you can give anybody, especially yourself_
“My brothers and sisters and I used to go to the next-door neighbours’ house to watch.”

“Okay, but there’s one more thing ...”

“Yes?”

“Don’t you think it was awfully splendid of Mandela to come out of prison after so many years, not even a bit angry at white people for doing what they did to him?”

I look at him. So young and yet he already has a sense of right and wrong.

“You’re quite right my son.”

“Was he not imprisoned for something like fighting for his freedom or something?”

“Yes, he was.”

“Now think about it, Mom ... if you were treated like that, imprisoned for something worth fighting for, wouldn’t you, when you come out of prison, be very angry and waiting for an opportunity to get back at the people who put you there?”

“Yes, that’s true, Mark. Any normal person would’ve come out of prison angry and revengeful. That’s why I think Mr. Mandela is the perfect example of somebody that knows how to forgive and, believe me, forgiveness is the greatest gift you can give anybody, especially yourself.”
I watch while he walks away. It’s good for a child to have an inquisitive mind, and he certainly has plenty of that.

Forgive. I think about what I just said. That word certainly carries a lot of weight … I close my eyes again. The sun is so lovely, so warm…

I hear a whooshing sound past my left ear and I don’t realise what’s happening at first, not until I hear the gunshot and the sound of breaking glass. I freeze. Somebody is shooting at me! Then it dawned on my conscience – he actually pulled the trigger! I start crying. My father nearly killed me!

The memory of what happened that dreadful night forces me to open my eyes. I feel around for a tissue. My husband and child must not see me cry now. They will not understand and this is something I could never talk about … well, not yet anyway. I’ve been deceiving myself, thinking that I’d be able to suppress all the bad memories about my childhood. I know that, unless I deal with it, they will stay with me and I’ll be reminded of them at times I least expect. My parents are both dead and they certainly cannot change what happened ... and neither can I.

I hear a whooshing sound past my left ear and I don’t realise what’s happening at first, not until I hear the gunshot and the sound of breaking glass
There were police officers all over our house. The neighbours must’ve called them. They ransacked the house and confiscated all my dad’s guns, as well as the one he used at the time of the shooting. He put up a huge fight, but one of the policemen cuffed him and sat him down in the living room. They treated him like dirt! Total chaos reigned in our house that evening. I remember wishing the police would leave. I didn’t want them there ... I felt ashamed and humiliated. My pride was shattered! The police unlocked the door for my crying brothers and sisters and asked me a lot of questions. God, what a lot of questions ... I was so tired. I did not want to cooperate at first. I just sat there, crying and shaking my head. Someone gave me a glass of sugar-water and after I calmed down, I was able to tell the whole story. They asked about my mother and I told them I didn’t know where she was and that my parents had a terrible fight earlier that day. Maybe she got scared and ran away ...

“This is unfortunately more serious than you think,” one of the policewomen spoke to me in a soft tone.

“The bullet that missed you went into your opposite neighbour’s house, through the window and into their living room, right next to where their children were watching television.”

I couldn’t respond.

“We are opening a case of attempted murder against your father and you will have to testify. He nearly killed you ... you know that, don’t you?” she asked as gently as she could.
“But he did not mean to…”

“That’s not important. He is a danger to himself and to others ... we are going to take him into custody.”

“No! Please don’t! He won’t do it again!” I pleaded.

“I’m so sorry, child, but this is the only way. Tell me, how often do your parents drink and fight like this?” she asked, concerned.

I couldn’t look her in the eyes.

“No, what do you think will happen the next time he gets drunk and decides to use a knife instead of a gun? Do you think you will be able to stop him? He might end up killing all of you. We will have to take him in and make sure this does not happen again!”

As the police were shoving my father in the police van, my mother made an appearance and started screaming and swearing at them, insisting that they release my father immediately. She even tried to stop them by force and nearly got locked up as well. I wished I was dead.

He might end up killing all of you. We will have to take him in and make sure this does not happen again!”

The whole episode turned out to be very distasteful, even more than I anticipated. The police opened a case of attempted murder and I was their “star witness”.

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Through all of that I still had to live with my parents under the same roof. My dad was released on bail and the atmosphere in the house couldn’t get more unbearable. My mother made sure to remind me that my father was going to prison, and that it was entirely my fault. A familiar feeling of fear suddenly grips me and I shiver in spite of the warm sun. I remember the court building ... big, cold, unpleasant. I was very frightened and completely unsure of what was expected of me. They did not take me to the main courtroom, but directly to the judge in his chambers. He was a kind man and must’ve sensed that I was scared, because he reassured me and said that the whole process was necessary to help my dad. He asked me to tell him exactly what happened that night.

I ended up crying and pleaded with the judge to drop the case, which he, very reluctantly, resolved to do. My father was called into his chambers and he was given a very strict verbal warning. My dad sincerely apologised and promised to stop drinking.

“Mom!”

I open my eyes.

“I’m going outside to ride my bike.”

“Okay Mark, but be back in half an hour for lunch.”

“I spoke to Vined about Mandela, Mom. Do you know he was in prison for twenty-seven years? That is so long!
Do you still have the photo we took with me standing in front of his prison cell on Robben Island?”

“Yes. It is in our family album.”

“See ya later, alligator.”

I smile as he leaves the room.

Needless to say, my parents never stopped drinking ... as a matter of fact, both their deaths were as a result of their excessive alcohol intake. As I grew older, I had to find a way, deep inside myself, to forgive them for everything they did. Forgiving them gave me the closure I was seeking. It set me free. The freedom we all seek lies in the forgiveness of the past, the same way Mandela could let twenty-seven years of injustice go. It is a matter of attitude. With the right attitude, anything is possible!

“Sonia! What are you doing?”

“Hi Vined, just daydreaming and enjoying the sun.”

“Are you crying?” he looks worried.

“Yes and no. I did actually. I was momentarily reminded of an incident from my childhood, something unpleasant, but nothing to worry about; you could say it’s been resolved.”

“Mark interrogated me earlier about the ‘old’ days of apartheid. He seems to have a keen interest in History.”
I Can Forgive

I laugh. “He always wants to know ‘what happened’.”

I look up at the face of my husband.

“Do you know that I love you very much?”

“What’s wrong?”

I chuckle.

“How can something be wrong if I say I love you?”

“Because I know you love me. No need for unnecessary words,” he pulls me up from the chair.

“You know, Vined, a lot of people must’ve thought our relationship will never work. That it was doomed from the start. You know how racist some people still are, even after all these years of freedom and democracy.”

Vined folds me in his arms.

“Hmm … but how can it not work? An Indian straight from Durban and a boeremeisie from Pretoria? I would call it a winning recipe!”

I nestle my head on his shoulder and smile.

“Yes, how can it not?”

Forgiving them gave me the closure I was seeking. It set me free.
It is said that everything happens for a reason. What reason is there for me to go through what I went through? What purpose? What lesson in life am I supposed to learn besides learning to be vindictive and hateful? I learned very early on in life that no one owes me anything.

Growing up in the township I witnessed all kinds of abuse: physical, emotional, economical and sexual. And being the smart girl I was, I knew I would never find myself in such situations. I mean why would anyone put themselves in that situation longer than they should? They can always leave.

When I met my boyfriend I was first attracted by the bad boy image – I mean opposites attract. To a church-going girl, non-drinker/smoker the behaviour of a functional alcoholic, who was angry as hell and definitely not on the same level as I was, intrigued me.
The Uprising

He was a mystery I had to solve. Very early in our relationship he would speak in a controlling manner, sometimes being demeaning. I don’t want to make excuses for myself because that’s the first sign of denial. Yes, I knew better but I guess it was not enough for me. He moved from being controlling to being abusive and an alcoholic.

Take heed of that nagging feeling of irritability, especially when the ones close to you stick their noses in your business; they might just save you from you or save you from wasting the best years of your life, or even save your life. Even if you manage to get out of that situation, you are not the same person. I have recently learned that when welcoming or inviting someone into my life it affects everyone in my life.

My story is no different from any other woman who is in the cycle of abuse; it’s the abuse, the apologies, the promises not to do it again, you walking around on egg shells, trying to please and be good when tension builds up and it starts all over again. I actually did not believe that my story was the worst because I kept on witnessing other people and comparing and felt that I’m better than others, oblivious to the fact that it’s a cycle which repeats itself in various ways.

My story is no different from any other woman who is in the cycle of abuse
I’ve been beaten until I had a black eye, humiliated in public, intimidated, threatened, silenced, sexually assaulted and yes, almost killed. I ran away only to come back. I got a protection order, stayed in a place of safety only to come back again for more. It never gets better, trust me.

People in a great deal of pain will try to inflict that pain on those close to them and no, you can’t help them or try to change them with enough love. You will only be their victim and only now do I believe that if you allow people to use and abuse you, they start thinking that it’s acceptable and you are okay with it.

I prayed long and hard to build enough faith; went from one church to another telling my story countless times; learned how to meditate. Nothing seemed to work. I began believing that this life was my fate. Sometimes I thought things would work if I loved him more or if I was as obedient as possible, and when that did not work I begin to day dream about suicide because I had no support system. I felt so dejected, useless, unworthy and stupid.

If you allow people to use and abuse you, they start thinking that it’s acceptable and you are okay with it.
The Uprising

As a smart girl, I believed I was somehow quiet inside because I began reading again and the lady at the library introduced me to IYANLA. I think God used her as an angel. God was listening after all. I had been praying but not waiting and listening to the answers.

I started buying books like *The Secret* and *Conversations with God* and I have to say it was the kind of food that gave me my life back. The kind of love I was in was like an addiction, it was like a pill I could not live without even though it could kill me. I tried, praying to God to come down and save me because even after I managed to leave, my boyfriend would find me, intimidate me and take me back into his hell.

In all my attempts, trying to get my life back, I forgot to apply myself and believe in myself. I kept on expecting an angel to come down and save me. I kept expecting God to punish him for me but he came back every single day as himself – healthy, fit, mean and cruel to me. When all excuses fail and your fear becomes your strength, your self-pity becomes determination, you have to take a stand and take on this battle because no one can fight it for you.

I rolled up my sleeves, faced terror right in its face and began to apply myself, aligning myself with myself. I realised that I needed to trust myself, but most of all I needed to love myself and forgive myself. While making these changes on a day-to-day basis something shifted; I evolved and I awakened.
I’ve evolved in a sense that I could not take any more beatings, degradation or denial. I moved back to my mother’s when my boyfriend realised that I was not his victim any more. I could take him on when we spoke on the phone and, oh yes! he tried to break me and intimidate me again, except I also realised that he was the weaker one, the troubled one and the coward.

I never felt so liberated, so alive. Remember the saying “everything happens for a reason”. The reason I went through all that was to find my strength, to really learn what it means to love and respect myself. Everything is forever changing, nothing stays the same forever. All you need to do is to allow yourself to evolve and honour yourself.

The reason I went through all that was to find my strength, to really learn what it means to love and respect myself.
It seemed I had stumbled onto a territory where the regime in governance was founded on the pillars of calloused consciences and hard hearts, objectification and lies for the sake of and for pure self-service.

At 25, I still had never been in a romantic relationship. To be clear, let me say that, to me, being in a relationship was as equal and big a dream as being a singer, writer, fashion designer, healer or world missionary who lives in New York.

A young man, a couple of years my senior, expressed his interest and pursued me relentlessly. He called and expressed “kindness”; called and said wonderful things to me until I gave in.

Although this recall of events is not much about the details of that relationship, and what hurtful and harmful things resulted, it is to say that five men later, much like him – the system, its implementation, its process and the
ends – have all been the same. Wolves covered in sheep skin, they all were. Telling all the lies to convince an unsuspecting, untiringly good person like me, wanting love, into some sort of relationship. All for the sake of carnal self-satisfaction.

Am I jaded, cynical and bitter? No. This is to clearly report how it was and what it was, now that I have sorted through it all. Thank the gift of retrospection.

More relevant and more recent events, however, are the main reason for this recount. A good report indeed. I am 28 years old now and a revolutionary appeared on the scene and challenged and overthrew the regime I spoke of earlier. How I admire his courage. He came on the scene, saw their weapons but knew he had already won. His weapons were different. They were tenderness, transparency and kindness. Truthfully so.

How I admire this recent change. It is this text, sent in a quiet moment of reflection, that I now sit and read over and over:

I watch now as he quietly builds a temple informed by tenderness and sensitivity and based on expanding true love
“Do you know that, as you stand, personal to me and specific to part of my life story, you are an icon of revolution? I cannot comprehend the sudden release from prior oppression but I am truly grateful that you dared to be unusually bold and as tender as you have been. Thank you for your courage.”

Yes, it is to the man I love. “Coming correct”, as they say. He was straightforward. He waited. He was gentle. He respected. He was genuine. He courted. He afforded my needs and wants. None of which were material. He upheld his and my dignity. He did not harm. I suspect that the most important is that he did not shift or trample on my boundaries.

I watch now as he quietly builds a temple informed by tenderness and sensitivity and based on expanding true love. He carefully places vulnerability and gentleness on top of the foundation of love. He waits patiently for days for things to settle. He then continues with the truth, dignity and fun all beautifully laden. Meekness: a restrained strength is our roof. Meekness, that inherited him me and me him.

He is my revolutionary. Beaming and proud in the sunset, we sit and admire what he has built, admire what in the midst of much hopelessness, he dared to resurrect: the good thing – love.
Kamoroa ho dilemo tse leshome le mesto e mehlono ke nyetswe ke motho eo ke mo ratileng bokgarebeng baka. O ile a nkutlwisa bohloko ka ho nhlefekesta a ba a nnyanhlatsa. Sena se ile sa mmakatsa hoba ke re o a nthata, ke ne ke utlwa mofuthu ha ke le dialteng tsa hae empa tseotsohle di ile tsa nyamela jwalo ka mohodi sepakapakeng. Ke lekile ka tselo tse ngata ho qoba kanohano ka ho etela mafapha a thusang ka dikeletso tsa malapa le manyalo, ha bo a ka ba le nko ho tswa lamina , ka ha ken e kere Tiisetso e tswala Katlego.

Love and Revolution

Se ileng sa ntelebetsa maikutlo haholo ke ha ke furallwa ke mme motswadi ha lenyalo la ka le ya bofeleng. Motho eo ya mphileng lerato bonyaneng, ke yena ya nkentseng hore ke se hlole ke eba le tshepo ho mang kapa mang, tsepo ya ka ya eba ho Modimo. Bana ba bane bao re hlohonololaditsweng ka bona, ka leka ka hlole ho ha fa lerato ka ho phethahala le ka botlalo, ka kwala le sekgeo sa ntata bona. Hona ke ho entse le batho ba ileng ba mpha tshehetso, mme ba e nale kuthwelo bohloko le lerato baneng. Ho ne ha le bohloko hobane tseng tsohole ha di qala ho entsahala ke ne ke sa sebeste. Seo ke ikonkang ka sona ha ke a ka ka tllelwa ke monahamo wa ho iphedisa ka tselo di sele, tse kang ho batla ho kena maratanong kapa hona ho batla motho ya tla nthusang ho hodisa bana ba ka, hobane hoo ke ne ke tsepah o tla nkenya tsietseing le ho utlwisa bana ba ka bohloko, hobane ho ne ho tla tshwanele hore ke nke lerato leo ke ratang bana ba ka ka lona le fe motho eo, ke rate yena ho feta bana ba ka.

Ke utlwile bohloko hook e tswileng ka hara ntlu ya ka hobane e ne e mpakela masisa pelo, ka leba lapeng hobane ha eke botshabelo. Leha ke sa ka ka fumana tshehetso lapeng empa setjhabeng ke e fumane, ka ema ka tiya. Ha a tla mpontsha Sehlolo sa hae ke ha a ile a fihla ka matsha ke robotse le ngwana a le dilemo tse nne, a ankile nnolati, a nhlanohela ka tselo ya mohlalo. Olile a notlela a tshwana dinotlolo ho yena. A ntsona a mpontsha mafura a koloi a re hobane ke sa nkgathala empa ke dutse ka manganga, ke tsebe love ke tsatsi la ho qetela. Hona moo a laholela ditebele tse pedi, yaba ho ntekane. Ha ke a ka ka ka lweletsa ka ho tshaba ho tsosa ngwana, ke ile
iphetes ka ho hamore (hammer) ka mo bata hangwe sephokong a wa, ka potleka dinotlolo ho tswa lengwana ka ya jwetsa baahelani se otsahetseng. Ke ne ke tsonile hore o a phela kapa ha a phela, empa ke ne ke etsa sena ka ho itshireletseng. Tla ke a ka ka tswarwa hobane ha a ka a ya seponeseng. Ke lona lebaka le leholo le nkentseng love ke se hlotse ke kgutlelo ha ka, hobane hlekefetso ena e ne eba ka magetlo, ke ye ha eke kgutle, empa ka kopola mantswe a reng leboella le aja, leha ke sa ka ka fumana tshehetso lapeng ke ile ka ema ka tiya.

Tsohle tse nhlahetseng di ile ntisa, tsa nketsa mohale. Ke Ithutile le ho lemoha love batho ba bangala ha ba na kutlwisiso ya lerato. Lerato le ile la fetoha lehlayo ho yena hobane le bana ha a ka a hloba a ba fepa. Bana jwale ba hodile mme ba ntshedisa ka nako tsohle, ke bashemisa baba raro le ngwanana a le mong. Soe ke se lebohelang ke re love le bana ba ratang thuto haholo, ba tswela pele thutong tse phahameng. Lona ke ka tshehetso ya batho. Ke leboha ha ke ile ka bua bothata ba ka, ka fumana dithuso ka ditsela tse ngata, etswe matsoho a hlatswana.

Se seng se ileng sa nthusa ke ho qoba batho tla buang dipuo tse tetebetsang maikuto a ka, ke kahoo ke ithatang nne pele motho e monga e wa nthata. Leha ho ne le boima ke ne ke leka kahohle bore ke robala ke thabile, bana battle ba thabe le bona. Se seng seo ke se entseng jwalo ka mme wa sebele ke ha ke tsebile ho fa bana ba ka, kaha e le bashamane, maele ha ba kena bohlankeng ba bona. Ka etsa mohlala ka nna bore ba se wele tebetebeng ba eso tsebe ho ikemela le ho ba le boikarabelo.
Ke ne ke batla ba untilwe tsohle ka nna e seng ka batho. Ke ne ke etsetsa ho qoba hlekefesto ya mahumadi le baretsana. Ha e le ngwana wa ngwanana ya dilemo di le shome ho mmontsha tsela entle ya ho hola, kaha thupa e kojwa e sa le mesti.

Ke ile ka hlekefetswa pela hae a sa le monyenyane. Ke mo rutile hore a se thetswe, o ye le kgongwano bodimo bore o a ratwa. Tla ke na pelaelo ya ho elesta motho e mong bore a se hlahelwe ke se nhlahetseng, kahatne sela e botswana ho ba e tsebang.

Le ngwaneso ba ntebela lapeng, ke bitswa ka mahlapa, ba nketeleletha ka dintho tseo ke sa di etseng le ho mpea melato le bana ba ka feela hore ke tswe, empa ke se ke qetile le maikutlo a ka ho ba suthela. Ke a tshwarwa ke iswe makgothleng a dingwew mm eke fumanwe ke se molato. Tsena tsohle ke bona di tla nkgutlisetsa morao hammoho le bana ba ka. Ke se ke le tetse le hae, kef la tswana ke iphumelele kgotso, hobane ntwao ke e hitse. Ha ramasedi a sa mpeile, ke bala lemo tse seng kaee feel ke tla be ke twala moqhaka wa tlholo. Ke bua ke sa tshabe ke se na pelaelo.

Ke uthwiswa boholoko ke batho ba nkang maphelo a bona ha ba teana le ditsietsi, ha re ka ithuta feela hore bopheloo bo tshwana le maqhubu, bo a theosa bo nyolose, se bathehang ke tiisetso. Ha matho a wele a tshe a itlhototho e qalele ka leeto la hae. Se seng se etsang hore batho ba nke maphelo a bona ke ho ba le sephiri ba shwelle ka hare. Ho bua ho a thusa hobane o tla fumanako thuso. Ke a lemoha hore bat eng ba tshehisang ka batho
ha ba le ditsietsing, empa e seng bohle. O tshehuwa le ke motho eo o reng o mo tshepile, kahoo re na le mmuso o re utlwelang bohloko re le batho, ke kahoo re nale mafepha a dithuso.

Ke ile ka lahla tshabo, ho se itshepe le ho iphumana ke le molato, hona ho etsahetse kamorao hoba ke etswe lekgboa la hlekeletso ke moena wa ka.

E ne ere ha a nhlekefeditse ka la maobane, hosane o ne a re molato ke wa ka, a bea mabaka a hae a seo a se entseng, empa a boele, a kope tshwarelo. Ke ile ka buleha mahlo hore ehile lerator le bophelo hadi sa le yo, kaha a ne a mpapisa le basadi be bang kantle. Ke lekile kahohle ho bontsha monna wa ka ho rata le ho mo fa moluthu empa ha a ka a le amohela le ho le thabela.

Kajeno ke Ikemetse, ken ale kgotso le lerator, di nthuta botho le hore ke rate wa heso jwaleka ha ke ithata. Seo ke ithutileng sona ke ho bua mantswe a ahang, a kgothatso le tjhebelopele, hobane ke ithutile hore hake bua tse bohloko, hlopheho mme le tse ileng tsa nhlahela tse bohloko, di tla mamarella mme nkeke ka hlola mathata le ditsietsi, ts ntobileng. Monahano wa ka ha o lokolla kgonahalo mantswe a ba le matla. Mantswe a ka etsa tse ntle ebile a ka etsa tse mpe. Kahoo ke bua tse ntle ka molomo wa ka ekakgona di etsahale. Ke ile ka ipotsa dintho tse ntle tseo ke di finyelletseng le tseo ke sa kang ka di fihlella, ke ile ka fumana ke lebala ka tsona tse mpe mme ka hahabella tse ntle. Le kajeno lenyalo ke a le tshaba, ha ke bona baratani ba nyala ke tlelwa, ke maisapelo ka lebaka la se nhlahetseng. Ha ke bona motho
wa botona ke bona mothetsi, empa ha se bona kaolela bal eng jwalo empa bongata ba bona ba motjheng oo.

Ho iwantsha sena ha ken a palaelo ya ho bitsa bbana ba ba banyana ho ba hlokomedisa le ho ba eletsa hore ba se wele.

Malumahadi le barwetsana ha re emeng ja maoto ho kgutlisa seriti sa rona ka ho iwantsha hlekefetso. Nna bohloko ke bo utlwile, kafumana thuso ka ba ka ikamohela. Ke folile moyeng le maikutlong, mme le yena moma wa ka ke mo inetse ho kgutlela ho yenaa. Sena ke se etsa hobane ke sa battle ho kenyetsa bana lehloyo ho ntate wa bona, hobane poho tse pedi hadi iwana ho lemala jwang. Ke utlwiswa bohloko ke mafumahadi a dutseng hodima mashala a hlengeng e leng yona hlekefetso, ska lerator kappa lenyalo ke qaalo le qelello ya lefetshe kappa bophelo, lebaka ke hobane re ineetse ho bona ho re etsetsa tsohle, e be re a thetseha e ka re a ratwa athe re a sebediswa. Qetellong seo o tla se fumana o tla o rekela lekase le malomo e leng tsona dipalesa, e be o bonrsha setjhaba kamoo a neng a o rata kateng, athe hal ho jwalo.


Ka nqenngwe rona re utlwisana bohloko ka borona, re
nea bahlekeletsi ba rona matla le morolo ba ipona seo ba se etsang se le setle. Re kenelana manyalong, re a senyeletsa na, motho a ntse a tsebe hore mme e mong o phela ka thata motseng wa hae, hammoho le bana ba hae, e tla nne e be yena a theosa a nyolosa, le monna wa hae a be a mo robatse le ha hae. Sena ke se seng sa diholo tse. La ho qetela ke rata ho bolela hore nna ke itlhokometse, ke rate ho phela bophelo ba ka ka botlalo hobane motho a phela hang feela, ho fihlela e ba mona bana ramasedi ha a nkgopotse.

La ho qetela ke rata ho bolela hore nna ke itlhokometse, ke rate ho phela bophelo ba ka ka botlalo hobane motho a phela hang feela, ho fihlela e ba mona bana ramasedi ha a nkgopotse
About four years ago, I moved from a dangerous and crime-infested block of flats in the city to a small town in a rural area, anxious to stay safe and hoping for peace, calm and quiet. For personal reasons, I was determined to maintain a low profile, minimising my contact with the community, disengaging myself from all social situations and barricading myself behind a devil’s fork.

One day – returning from grocery shopping at the local convenience store – I crossed an isolated piece of veld on my way home. It was a beautiful day. I felt rather sprightly as spring cheer was setting in. A tall, muscular man came towards me, gently greeted and offered to do “peace work” in exchange for payment. Not having a garden, I kindly declined his offer and headed on home.

Suddenly I felt a stick in my lower back. Then there was a bloody blow to the top of my head. The sheer force of the blow landed me on my knees. I was in agony, holding my head, crying and writhing with pain. In a fraction of
a second, the man was in front of me, yanking my hair and wielding the longest knife blade I've ever seen. An unbearable feeling of fear that simply cannot be conveyed in words invaded every fibre of my being, obstructing all rational thought. A vicious, seemingly insane maniac zig-zagging a knife in front of your face is a terrifying sight. I usually have an argumentative mentality, some fighting spirit, and am not easily open to compromise, but seeing his expression change from unbridled anger to unadulterated hate, fear turned me into an accommodator. I yielded completely to his intimidation and incomprehensible fury. I became his victim; his hostage.

Staying on my knees, I tried to negotiate, offering the grocery bags and the little change I had left. However, hysteria took over. I started crying uncontrollably, thinking that this evil face may be the last thing I'll ever see. The deep-seated malice etched over his face somehow managed to make even the most morally questionable character seem decent. At times – infrequently – this face still haunts me.

Bewildered, I begged for compassion. Tears, blood and words flowed as one. It had no impact. He hissed at me in broken English, threatening to skin me alive. Rage and

An unbearable feeling of fear that simply cannot be conveyed in words invaded every fibre of my being, obstructing all rational thought
resentment crackled in his voice. I flinched with horror as the blade sliced my hand. Then he grabbed the bags, ripped a cheap but sentimental gold trinket from my neck, took the change and casually sauntered off as if no harm had been done. As if nothing had happened.

Pumped with adrenalin, I ran home in record time, locking the door immediately. I became nauseous, headed for the bathroom and retched repeatedly. I climbed into the bath, adding an excess of antiseptic to wash away the residue of blood and sanitise the memory of my ordeal. Still nervous and panic stricken I somehow had the presence of mind to call my sole friend in town. When she answered, I cried so much I couldn’t speak. The few minutes it took her to get to me seemed like an eternity. I was so numb with shock I collapsed on her arrival. I was physically and emotionally spent.

News in a small town travels fast. When I regained consciousness, a group of people surrounded me, mostly complete strangers. One suggested calling the doctor,

*The sheer force of the blow landed me on my knees. I was in agony, holding my head, crying and writhing with pain*
offering to carry the cost, someone proffered a sedative, another rushed to the pharmacy for analgesics while others cradled me, offering comfort, consolation and support.

Through the choir of voices, I heard someone kindly whispering in my ear: “Don’t fret. We’ll take care of you. You’re safe. It’s okay.” Everyone seemed solution-focused rather than problem-obsessed. This pacified me.

Today I am less resilient, still believing my attacker to be the devil’s spawn. I remain traumatised and wary. I still constantly look over my shoulder, but my friend and strangers – who have become well-liked acquaintances – partly restored my faith in humanity. When I show signs of social withdrawal, they elevate my mood. When I become emotionally detached and feel insecure, they keep me positive. With their continued interest and support, they help me grow my confidence. Little by little, I am taking the tiny tentative steps I need towards healing. With their encouragement, I find that I now interact more actively with those around me, refusing to become emotionally solidified.

My horrible experience definitely left me shaken, but the love of the community taught me that although there are those that do harm, there are many more that heal.
those that do harm, there are many more that heal. It taught me that repressed anger and fear serve no one, it only deprives you of living the best life you can, robbing you of a future. Never underestimate the valuable support network a community offers. Those I initially viewed as strangers – my immediate community – brought me back from the brink. Maybe strangers are just friends you do not know.
NOTES FROM THE WRITERS
Mayshree Bhim (Ajanabi)
I am an award-winning radio environmental journalist, media marketing strategist, entrepreneur, wife, mother of three and member of the International Society of Krishna Consciousness.

I have recently formed the Girlfriend Network which is a platform to give back to the community by empowering women to overcome their difficulties. It is a network of ordinary women doing extraordinary things.

I used the pseudonym Ajanabi, which means unknown, because I wrote this piece feeling I have no identity. I was an Unknown but evolved from it as Myself – Mayshree Bhim.

Rose Tuelo Brock
I was born of the Leteane family of Mahikeng. I have spent most of my life outside South Africa, my country of birth.

After matriculation in Kilnerton Institution, and a B.Sc at Pius XII College, Lesotho, I left the country to teach.

In 1979, I moved to Galway, Ireland, with my husband and two sons, where I taught part time at the Galway Polytechnic until 1982 when, out of necessity, I had to be a full-time mother. I then took an active interest in community work and education. In 1992, I obtained a Diploma in Community Development.

That same year, with grants from Christian Aid, Trocaire and the Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland, and the support of a board of similar-thinking members, I opened and ran a Development Education Resource Centre, Galway, called One World. I played an active part in the anti-apartheid movement in Galway, Ireland, from 1979 to 1994.
I have written essays and taken part in discussions on various development subjects such as discrimination (age, gender and racial), the arm’s trade, world aid, world debt, unfairness and injustice in world trade and its impact on the developing world, etc. Some of my essays have appeared in publications, including government papers in Ireland.


I write poetry and short stories. Some of my poetry has appeared in two anthologies of women’s poetry in Ireland.

I returned to Mahikeng in 2008. Lately, despite lack of land, I have taken up herb gardening and bee keeping with the aim of passing on such skills to women in the community.

**Kerry Jane Guttridge**

I was born in Durban on 13 July 1955 and grew up in KwaZulu-Natal until my family relocated to Zimbabwe where I received my primary and secondary education.

A graduate of the universities of Natal (Pietermaritzburg) and Cape Town, I am a teacher of Literature and English and a copywriter by profession. I am a single, free, middle-aged woman currently based in Grahamstown where I celebrate my embryonic African renaissance.

**Sophie Nare Hlatshwayo**

A dream is what you inspire your life to be like and you meet opportunities and you align yourself with the right people. It has been my dream since very early in my life to write and share my thoughts, experiences and opinions.
I have always loved reading and writing and as a young girl I was never social and outspoken, and the only way to honour how I felt was to put it down on paper.

In my community, back in the old days, children were seen but not heard so you can only imagine the writing I did. I was born in Gauteng on 16 August 1975 and was raised by a village that valued the saying ‘it takes a village to raise a child’. My experiences in life have wisened me and taught me that no one is immune to social problems, no matter how knowledgeable you think you are. Feelings and emotions seem to take over at times.

Nicky Kleinhans
I am a single unemployed woman, due to sexual discrimination. A member of Bloemfontein Skrywers-vereniging, I started writing on the advice of a clinical psychologist. I thank POWA for the opportunity to write ‘15 Minutes of Hostage Hell’ as this has contributed to my healing process.

Lisa Koekemoer
I live in Cape Town and work as a freelance journalist. My debut short story, ‘Patience no More’, was selected for publication in POWA’s 2009 anthology *Journeys to Recovery*. Another two of my short stories, ‘Marilyn’ and ‘Lena’, were published in the subsequent POWA anthology, *Stories from the Other(ed) Woman*.

‘Immorality’ is an older short story which I wrote just after ‘Patience no More’, when I was exploring the apartheid-era Immorality Act. Like Thembela in ‘Immorality’, I think it is ludicrous that any form of just love could ever have been labelled as an act of immorality.
‘Immorality’ is a celebration of us moving on and us – like Sybrandt and Thembelo – being free to love.

Karen Denise Laine
I was born and raised in Bosmont, Johannesburg. I started my life on 20 July 1965. I was the youngest and only girl of three children. Both my parents and one of my brothers died a few years ago.

I attended primary school and secondary school in Bosmont and matriculated from Chris Jan Botha Senior Secondary School in 1982. After matriculating, I went to work, firstly as a clerk in a bank and, after holding various junior positions within an insurance company, became executive personal assistant. I have attained a good reputation as personal executive assistant to directors of well-known South African companies.

I have a daughter of 23 and 3 granddaughters aged 2, 4 and 9. I have faced adversity and continue to face adversity on a daily basis, but my spirituality is what gets me through the rough times. I am inspired by my writing, which started out as therapy for anger.

At present, I am unemployed, desperately trying to get back into the job market as a secretary/personal assistant, whilst writing a self-help manual based on my life experience and my spiritual journey. My goal in life is to teach others how to cope with adversity.
Joy Lange
I am married to John Lange and we have been blessed with twins, Matthew and Mia. Since March 2009 I have served as Director of St. Anne’s Homes. Prior to this I served as a voluntary board member of St. Anne’s Homes for nine years.

I spent twenty years in the corporate world and bring a wealth of knowledge and experience with me. I am currently completing my Master’s degree in Women and Gender Studies.

Sibongile Gloria Magagula
I was born in Mofolo, Soweto in 1961. I am the second born of four children and the only daughter. I grew up experiencing abuse at home which led to a divorce between my parents in 1974. It was a traumatic incident because I loved both my parents.

We moved to my maternal home in Dube. I grew up there but could not complete my schooling because I fell pregnant as a teenager. This led to my marriage in 1989 which I was unprepared for. I was blessed with three other children. In 1997, I obtained my Standard 10 with a merit; being 36 years old, it was my wish to achieve this. In 1999, my marriage turned into a mess as I was exploring myself. I fell into continuous abuse.

In 2004, I moved out of my matrimonial home with my children. I managed to bring them up on my own and two of them are now in tertiary institutions. In 2010, I entered the Love and Revolution essay writing competition run by POWA. I was inspired and touched because of my experiences and defeats in life.
At the moment, I am doing HIV/AIDS counselling as a volunteer in my community. I am presently waiting for opportunities and appointments within the community, because a community means building a healthy and prosperous nation.

Luana Malan
I am 25, a proud young mother of a smart and assertive four-year-old girl, Harmony. I am also the daughter of a tough-as-steel and remarkable mother, who is a warrior in her ‘Lovely Revolution’. Thank you God for her life. In Grade 8, my dear friend Tobi ignited my passion to write and taught me how to express what life reflects and allows me to feel. I obtained a BA degree in Political Science from Rhodes University.

It was my sociology lecturer, Prof. Adisina, who always used to say ‘study society like it matters’. This is my work. I am at home in the development sector – it is a beautiful challenge.

Nthabiseng Josephine Mofolo
I was born in Bloemfontein on 22 July 1984. I completed high school at Brebner High, and went on to further my education at the University of the Free State, where I graduated with a Bachelor’s degree in Information Technology, as well as an Honours degree in Economics. My parents are Ernest and Benedicta Mofolo, and I have an identical twin sister called Nthabeleng Adolphine Mofolo.

I am currently working as a biostatistician at Quintiles in Bloemfontein, and pursuing my MBA degree. I am very passionate about writing as I believe that there is nothing
more powerful than using the written word as an outlet for one’s thoughts and feelings, and that there is nothing more beautiful than the end product of having put pen to paper.

NoBuntu Mqulwana
I am a singer, writer and fashion/crochet designer and whatever else I am still becoming. I grew up in and around the Eastern Cape. I studied music, media and fashion design. I operate in all disciplines and have lived in Johannesburg since 2006.

Nandi Msezane
I have been reading since I was less than knee high, and my mom says I have not yet put my books down. At almost 30, I am a mother, poet, child of the world and child-rights activist specialising in human trafficking. My experiences travelling across the world have given me inspiration to write.

I wait for the day when no one knows hunger, no child is fearful, women feel secure in themselves and we express love with no expectations. I look forward to when my first anthology is published and I am a recognised poet, sharing my thoughts, lessons and insights in the world.

Nomvelo Myeza
I am from KwaZulu-Natal. I did a Gender Studies degree at UCT. I am currently working for an NGO known as TEACH South Africa, which places university graduates in underprivileged, disadvantaged schools where their skills are most needed in the country. I work in a school in Limpopo.
Lindiwe Nxumalo
I am a gender research officer who works in community development and who is a firm believer in the promotion of women’s rights as human rights. I have a keen interest in women’s and young girls’ issues. Originally from Swaziland, my background fuelled my passion for gender equality. I enjoy writing and using the written word to express my thoughts and as a tool of advocacy.

Natisha Patronella Parsons
I am a retired school teacher and a (divorced) mother of one adult daughter. I was born at Sir Henry Elliot Hospital, Umtata, on 8 February 1945. My really important birth date is 27 February 1990 when I was born again. I was given a whole new lease on life! My only regret is that I did not meet the LORD when I was 25. Life is GOOD.

Clairessa Samuels
I am a 31-year-old from the sunshine city, Durban. I am passionate about the written word and aspire to becoming a writer. I also enjoy crafting, travelling and spending time with my husband Shaun and my family.

Faith Mkhize Sinethemba
I am a 19 year old from, Mtwalume, KwaZulu-Natal. I matriculated in 2009, from Umzinto secondary school, and now I am studying a B.Com at Rhodes University, but writing is my passion too. Writing for POWA was a very big step for me because I have never been published. I also write poetry and love music. I hope I go as far as I can with my writing.
Madeleen Theron
I am a writer that pours my heart and soul into my work. I am a poet, a novelist and a children’s picture-book writer and love writing articles on a part-time basis. Several of my poems have been published and my children’s picture book for ages 6–10, \textit{Sparky the Dragon-horse}, has been accepted for publishing in 2011 by Fantasi Books. I also love going to the movies and playing the piano. I consider myself as a child of God, and thank Him for the life I have.
Other titles in this series

2005

2006

2007

2008

2009
Love and Revolution are two words rarely used together. Where love is associated with passion, desire and romance, revolution is often associated with revolt, uprising, riot and change, these seemingly opposing emotions. But love has the power to transform us in ways that not even we can imagine and sometimes love and revolution are in fact two sides of the same coin.

This volume represents the first year of the newly inaugurated POWA Women’s Writing Project. No longer a competition, this year’s collection tells of diverse women’s experiences of love: romantic love, love of family, love of friends, love of community – love that touches us in revolutionary ways that alters how we see and approach life.

Sometimes the most revolutionary act is to love.
And sometimes the revolution is an act of love.

POWA’s vision is to create a safe society that does not tolerate violence against women, where women are powerful, self reliant, equal and respected. POWA’s mission is to be a specialised and multi-skilled service provider that contributes towards the complete eradication of violence against women in society. POWA provides counselling, legal advice, court support and shelter to women survivors of domestic violence.

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