

# Foreword

Nomkhitha Magwentshu and I met twenty years ago in school, where she consistently demonstrated exceptional creativity and talent through her writing, including screenplays, scripts, and poetry, all of which displayed remarkable quality and originality.

In her book *Mama, Are You Proud?* Nomkhitha takes us on a rich sensory journey, where her vivid, descriptive writing fosters an intimate connection between the reader and the characters, evoking a range of emotions.

Nomkhitha's writing brings to life the journey of the main character, Nomakhwezi, who rises above a challenging, survivalist upbringing. Her self-awareness, determination, and intellect exemplify how resilience can empower individuals to overcome any obstacle.

Nomakhwezi's evolving journey, shaped by diverse perspectives, knowledge, and interpretations, builds anticipation and captivates the reader.

Throughout the book, several characters offer guidance and protection to Nomakhwezi, sharing wisdom and faith. Their collective presence creates a strong support network, helping her navigate challenges and contributing to her personal growth. These shared beliefs and experiences highlight the profound strength and significance of community and *Ubuntu*: "I am because we are," emphasising the interconnectedness of individuals and our collective responsibility to nurture future generations.

Unexpected revelations, intertwined with layered narratives, serve as reminders of the power of our decisions, how they shape the outcomes we experience and influence the reality we create. As we navigate life, our actions have the power to inspire, challenge, and define the course of history for those who come after us.

This book offers not just a story, but a profound reflection on the choices that define our lives. Nomkhitha has used her spiritual gifts, allowing God to work through her to inform, educate, and inspire us as readers.

Both the book and Nomkhitha herself are exceptional in every regard.

Boitumelo Monare.

Advocate for Education.

Founder and Director at Elevate Through Education.

22/10/24



*For Thixo' —God's— quintessential way of articulating His love for me, my Mama. And the potential that is gasping for freedom that is hidden deep in the youth of South Africa.*



# Prologue

At no time did I bring distraction into my breathtaking world. When I said, “Let there be light”, it meant more than all you could see. When I said, “Let there be light”, it was with the intention that all my creation would bring light into everything they devoted themselves to. It is no accident that I gave you the power of choice. I am not a tyrant; I am neither a hateful God nor a controlling one, nor do I find satisfaction in your suffering.

I Am that I Am, I am uThixo, I am love, I am praiseworthy and in my name all things are possible. You are all divine expressions of my image; don’t be fooled by the exterior of your flesh. That is just a garment that clothes my most precious masterpiece, and that, my love is you.

I loathe how you doubt me, but what grieves me the most is how lightly you take the power of being created in my image. I speak fluent reciprocity, and for you to comprehend the depth of my measure, I gave you the gift of choosing your course. It is intentional that you will never be able to do what I do, for I am uThixo, and there can only be one.

That said, you have a force of a million stars of exquisite possibilities that can only radiate if you choose to do something galactic with those stars.

Unfortunately, the same stars can also radiate self-sabotaging frequencies and generational displacement in the cosmos when the force isn’t centred in my word. Some individuals measure their worth by their situations because their circumstances seem hopeless; you then reflect that perception onto the wondrous potential I put into you.

Then there are those who bring a sweet aroma to the heavens, souls who maximise every star and birth galaxies of blessings. Spectators look on and proclaim that I love and favour them more. But that is a false

teaching. I love you all equally, and as different as you may look or sound, each of you is my favourite. Creating you was a thrill. I poured into you overflowing streams of love, bravery, diligence, laughter, joy, peace, forgiveness, creativity, tenacity and the ability to accomplish the unimaginable.

You came into the Earth realm prepared. You and I thoroughly discussed your unmatched greatness before you even stepped into your fleshly garment. You and I sat down and marvelled about how amazing you are. You agreed that I would take you through tests to see if you would flourish as a human in the Earth realm. We agreed. Yes, I know some of you chose to turn on me when you were in your flesh and followed the dark side. I can't stop you because I am a fair God. I believe in hope, change and forgiveness. I am love. In me, all things are possible. I have faith that one day, you will turn on your wicked ways and find unconditional love under the warmth of my wings.

The highest currency I gave you was faith and the anointing to accomplish your purpose on Earth. I don't control where you invest that currency; that is your choice.

In this parable, you will experience a series of people's choices and how they have shaped their world.

Love, *I am*.

# Roots

27 November 1984

*Transkei, Eastern Cape Province*

The grandeur of the sun celebrates her role as God's creation, ordained to be the engine of the Earth. Without her, nothing would exist. Her robust morning rise is undeniably magnificent, compelling the ocean to wave in her honour and bestowing her colossal presence upon the people of Transkei. Meanwhile, the lush green grass acknowledges the life-giving ocean, which never runs dry. The hills of Transkei are adorned with humble mud huts, their opaque surfaces reflecting a gentle homage to the sun.

Asanda stepped out of a turquoise hut to find her mother sitting on a wooden bench on a glistening polished red stoep, enjoying freshly made *amagwinya*—fat cakes. She stretched out her arm to offer Asanda the nibbles.

'Mama, stop!' She chuckled as she gently pushed away the bowl. 'I am trying to get rid of this baby weight, and those won't assist me with my goal. I love Nomakhwezi, but that baby changed my body. Mama, I have stretch marks,' she said, gently rubbing her abdominal area.

She sat next to her mother and felt ashamed at the realisation of how much weight she had gained.

'Did you see my stretch marks, Mama?' she asked.

'Asanda, my child, even the road cracks when Mother Nature wants her flowers to bloom.'

A baby's soft cry signalled that she needed attention. As Asanda was about to attend to her firstborn child, her mother stopped her from getting up.

'Go for your run, my child. I will watch over her.'

Relieved, Asanda bent to kiss her mother on the forehead, accompanied by a gentle grip on her mother's arm. Her Mama's cheeks glowed with warmth from ear to ear.

Transkei was the perfect location for any runner. Those parts of the motherland assisted in developing favourable muscle tissue and, of course, weight loss.

She ran on the trail carved in the grass by the locals' foot traffic. About a kilometre into her run, she encountered a group of children between ten and thirteen years old playing *uMgusha*.

*uMgusha* is an indigenous Nguni game of jumping sequences, popularly played by young girls in South Africa and sometimes challenged by boys. South African children use an old pair of pantyhose or stockings cut into a strip, then tied together with a knot on both ends, resulting in a circle.

Then, two selected players stand on opposite ends facing each other, with the *uMgusha* laced around them. The game's first level starts from the back of their knees, progressing to the final stage, the back of their necks. The game aims to showcase the players' ability to do set jumps through and above the *uMgusha*.

'Good morning, Nomakhwezi's mom!' they yelled.

'Good morning, children. Are you all well?' she asked with sincerity.

'We are fine,' they answered.

'That is just lovely,' she said as she smiled at them.

As Asanda was about to continue with her run, she was brought to a stop by a girl with rich, nappy hair and mahogany skin dressed in a yellow tunic calling out to her, disrupting the rhythm of the pace she was trying to maintain.

'Nomakhwezi's mom!' the girl shouted again nervously.

Asanda stopped and turned to give the girl her full attention, which startled the girl. The girl could sense a curious but urgent energy coming from Asanda. It made the little girl hesitant to speak.

A chubby little boy stood among the other children. He was light-skinned with freckles, and wore tight-fitting clothes that looked ready to burst at the seams if he dared to sneeze. He nudged the girl with the nappy hair on her waist. The gesture didn't impress her, though it seemed to give her courage to speak up.

The girl cleared her throat, gathering her courage to speak up.

‘Ahem... We heard that baby Nomakhwezi has completed her three-month cultural isolation period,’ she said. Wondering what to say next, she scratched the back of her head with her index finger.

‘May we please come and see her now?’ The girl burst out with abrupt confidence.

‘We promise we will be on our best behaviour. We will even ensure our hands are clean,’ the girl said with conviction.

Unfortunately, the girl with the nappy hair was visibly annoyed with the chubby little boy with freckles on his face. While pleading her case on cleanliness, he was stuffing down tomato-flavoured crisps that stained his fingers.

He wasn’t even bothered by the girl’s apparent annoyance with him. He wasted no time defending his position.

‘Yes! My name is Nkululeko. I promise we will be on our best behaviour,’ he mumbled convincingly. His stuffed mouth and stained fingers did not contribute much to their case of cleanliness.

Now, the girl was officially irked by the boy’s boorish behaviour. The others, including Asanda, found it entertaining and laughed.

‘Besides,’ Nkululeko continued his plea, ‘my mother also has a newborn as well, you know, and she lets us play with my little sister, Nobomi, every Sunday after church for twenty minutes. It’s good for the child to play with us because we teach her social skills.’

As he continued to state his case, Asanda decided to cut in on his pleas. ‘Fifteen minutes,’ she said sternly.

‘Hooray!’ they rejoiced.

Soon after, they broke into a light argument about dividing the fifteen minutes between all eight of them. The girl did her best to take the leadership role in the quarrel.

Asanda was amused, though slightly concerned, that she had agreed to let the boisterous children meet her precious firstborn, baby Nomakhwezi.

She left the squabble behind as she continued her trail, eventually leading her into a dry valley. When she got to the midpoint of the hills, she was mesmerised by walls of green grass that encircled her. The view of a clear blue sky and walls of green grass spellbound her.

At the very spot where she was standing, fascinated by her surroundings, she felt the belly of the ocean rumble beneath her feet. She was so

intrigued that she placed both her palms flat on the foot of the hill to experience the vibration of the ocean.

She listened to music through her headphones when Letta Mbulu's upbeat song, *The Village*, came on her cassette player. The song always got her moving, filling her with energy. It was as if the rhythm urged her to keep going. She stood upright, tilted her head towards the sky, and screamed at the top of her lungs.

She knew no one could hear her, which made the feeling of release even more exhilarating. She looked up to the crest of the hill and charged with all her might towards the top.

When she reached the summit, she dropped to the ground like a statue and lay on her back, trying to catch her breath. She let out a howling laugh while panting; it was a release because she was proud of herself.

Then suddenly, she was eclipsed by a man's figure. He was wearing red shorts, a white vest and black running shoes.

His unexpected presence frightened her. She removed her headphones, sat up, looked up at the man and slapped his calves. It was her old childhood friend, Luvuyo.

'You scared me,' she said to him in relief.

'I am sorry; your mother told me you went for a run. I knew I would find you here.'

Asanda reached out to him with her hand so that he could help her up.

'I miss this,' she said, admiring the view.

'I've been to many places, but home always feels like an ongoing love story between my ancestors and God.' She said, smiling at him.

'Where are you running to?' She asked her old childhood friend.

'I need to go to my uncle; he is at the shebeen,' he said.

'Let me go with you,' she proposed.

'No way!' He chuckled. He bent to pick up a stone and threw it towards the Indian Ocean.

She joined in on the action. 'Come on,' she insisted.

'No, you can't,' he said, tickling her waist in complete innocence.

'Gosh, those old men need to stop complaining about women in pants,' she said.

'Now that is the one thing I don't miss about this place: its outdated

rules from the eighteen hundreds. Let me leave you to it, and good seeing you, my friend.'

She ran off as Luvuyo watched her slowly disappear into the distance. He cupped his hands around his mouth to project his voice.

'When will I see you again?' He shouted.

'How about eighteen-eighty-never?' She shouted back.

*11 March 1993  
Sandhurst, Gauteng Province*

It had been nine years since Asanda gave birth to her little girl, Nomakhwezi.

On a rainy day in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg, Asanda was out, heading back to her house after her morning run.

The rain caught her on the road; she wasn't distressed because she enjoyed running under such conditions.

Even though the skies were grey, the beauty of their upper-class neighbourhood was still apparent: manicured gardens, towering trees, and the bold architectural designs of the houses.

About eighty metres ahead was Asanda's gorgeous Tuscan home with a rustic feel. It had modern features and a majestic gate flanked by a varnished brick gateway that glistened like pearls in the rain.

The house had a three-door wooden garage attached to the double-storey home, accentuated by wooden-framed windows that played hostess to the daylight.

Asanda entered her home through a revolving door. As the door shut behind her, so did the sound of the rain crash against the Earth. The interior of the house created a dreamlike atmosphere from sunrise to sunset.

She walked under a crystal chandelier towards the kitchen, and the winsome movement of light refracted from the crystals landed against her wet face.

She entered the modern, open-plan kitchen. Her husband stood at the coffee machine, with his back turned to her. Asanda's mother, now known as *uMakhulu*—meaning grandmother in isiXhosa—was buttering toast for her nine-year-old granddaughter, Nomakhwezi, who sat beside

her. Makhulu had been travelling back and forth from the Transkei to help Asanda raise Nomakhwezi.

‘Mama,’ Nomakhwezi shouted in excitement at seeing her mom.

A dark, handsome bald man with a well-kept corporate beard, dressed in pencil-grey flannel trousers and a crisp white long-sleeved Ralph Lauren shirt with a navy-blue tie, turned to smile happily at the sight of his lovely wife.

He grabbed a neatly folded cream bath towel from a laundry basket beside the washing machine under the sink. The handsome brown man dried Asanda’s braided hair and draped the towel over his gorgeously captivating wife’s head. He was so tall that he quickly overshadowed her hourglass physique, sculpted by her dedication to a healthy lifestyle, and gently kissed her forehead.

‘Baba, wipe Mama’s back too; she is shaking,’ said Nomakhwezi.

The house phone rang, and uMakhulu picked it up.

‘Hello, yes, Madondo, it’s for you,’ Makhulu said to her son-in-law.

Asanda’s husband’s name was Daluxolo Madondo, but it was a sign of respect to refer to the head of the household by their last name.

‘I will take it in my office,’ he responded.

He walked through the passage Asanda had entered earlier. To the right was his home office, and to his immediate left was the family room, decorated with comfortable-looking cream-brown microfiber sofas, all arranged around a low, wide mahogany coffee table. On the table lay large books about the majesty of indigenous South Africa. The table rested on a brown cowhide rug, and across from it stood a rear-projection television set against the wall.

In his office, he sat in a brown leather chair behind a wooden desk adorned with framed photographs of Asanda and Nomakhwezi.

‘This is Madondo,’ he announced to the person on the other side of the line. He was unimpressed by the call.

‘This again? Listen here, if you want this job, then take it. Titles do not sway me; I am about the work and my people!

‘This position doesn’t change a single thing about the type of man I am. My mission is to give my daughter a prospering and equal South Africa, and to uphold the Freedom Charter’s vision. Unlike you, I always do the work, even when no one is watching.

‘It is incredibly disappointing and frustrating that during the compli-

cated birth of brown people's freedom, you are obsessively concerned about having a seat at the table instead of making sure that our people can finally erect their castles of opportunities in our land. I am warning you. Stop calling my house and stay away from my family; you will not bully me,' he growled.

He listened to what seemed like a lengthy response to what he said. You could see him being exhausted by the caller's threats. He dropped his head into his left elbow, causing the telephone to fall away from his ear. He could still hear the man on the other end speaking.

The voice on the other end of the line dripped with venom, threatening Madondo once more. This time, the fury was palpable, fuelled by seething hatred. Madondo's name, spoken with admiration and respect, had now become a source of bitter resentment among his enemies. The caller couldn't bear the fact that, upon becoming the first Black president of the Republic of South Africa, Nelson Mandela had chosen Madondo for a confidential position as a Member of the Executive Council (MEC). Mandela had personally committed to guiding Madondo towards becoming a distinguished Premier of Gauteng in the future.

The phone callers demand was blunt and unmistakable: Madondo must reject Mandela's offer, or else...

At that moment, Nomakhwezi joyfully kicked her blue beach ball into the family room.

'Khwezi!' her mother called from the kitchen.

'Ma.'

'You are going to break something,' Asanda warned her daughter.

'Mama, I won't.'

She gladly ignored her mother and kicked the ball straight into her father's office. She ran after it, but she didn't make it past the door.

At that very moment, Madondo let his anger overpower him. He stood from his chair and hurled the cordless phone at a glazed-framed painting above his whisky table. The glass shattered across the room. His startled daughter shrieked; she was terrified. Her mother and grandmother came rushing into the home office.

Asanda, also enraged, chided Nomakhwezi. Nomakhwezi stood helplessly, her little eyes raised towards her mom. It was as though she were looking through her mother's eyes, probing for compassion.

Her mother, unmoved, continued to strike her with cruel words, and Nomakhwezi simply surrendered to the punishment. It was a heart-breaking sight, like watching her entire world collapse. It felt like the balloon of her blissful life had just burst, and the snapping rubber lashed against her skin.

Her father looked like an intruder, and her mother was a tyrant. She withdrew into her thoughts for safety while her mother continued rumbled on, like rocks tumbling down a mountainside.

Asanda recognised that Nomakhwezi was disengaged, which infuriated her, causing Asanda to grab her by the shoulders and shake the life out of her child. Nomakhwezi stared at the movements of her mother's lips as her rage spewed venom. Meanwhile, Asanda appeared to be exploited by an energy that repulsed peace.

'Mama, I didn't do anything.'

Her father grabbed his car keys and left the room without acknowledging, let alone correcting, what was happening.

Makhulu walked back into the office with a dustpan and a hand broom. She noticed the beach ball's location in relation to the phone and realised that it was near impossible that Nomakhwezi had caused the damage, that it was her troubled son-in-law who did it.

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Later that evening, Asanda and her mother were seated alone at the kitchen table, having dinner. Makhulu prepared grilled chicken, steamed butternut, and creamed spinach.

Asanda shuffled her food and stared deep into her plate as if staring at her reflection.

'You know she didn't do it right?' her mother remarked.

'Huh?' she asked as she jolted out of her reverie.

'Nomakhwezi didn't break the painting,' she repeated.

# By the Tree Trunk

12 March 1993

*Sandhurst, Gauteng Province*

The heart of our solar system, burning with Thixo's glory, gave a grand opening that never gets old for the living, introducing a brand-new day. The fresh air sang along with the breeze into the Madondo home through slightly opened windows.

Nomakhwezi walked into the family room to find her father on the couch, catching up on a soccer match. In the kitchen, her mother beat eggs for her pancake batter, and bacon strips were sizzling on the fryer.

Makhulu sat at the kitchen table, reading the morning newspaper and enjoying a hot rooibos tea.

Nomakhwezi found the juxtaposition of yesterday's grimness and this morning's tranquillity baffling, a calm she had always been accustomed to. She struggled to stay present, as her world had already revealed the cracks behind her perfect family mural.

Madondo noticed his daughter and grabbed the remote control to pause the game. He leant forward and sank his elbows into his upper thighs.

'*Sawubona, nkanyezi yami*— I see you, my star,' said her father with guilt.

'Hello, Baba,' Nomakhwezi responded, eyes on the floor, fidgeting with the belt of her fluffy orange gown. 'Baba, I am sorry about what happened yesterday.'

Her father, embarrassed by the undeserved apology, immediately walked towards her and picked her up, and she naturally wrapped herself over her father's left shoulder.

‘Oh no, you did nothing wrong, my baby. I am the one who should be sorry,’ he said, his deep voice sinking in shame.

Madondo carried his daughter into the kitchen, where the aroma of Asanda’s breakfast filled the air. They joined Makhulu at the round table. Nomakhwezi sat beside her father, while Makhulu, absorbed in the Sunday Times newspaper, sat across from them, barely noticing as Asanda placed her breakfast in front of her.

While Asanda was cooking for her family, Nomakhwezi also ignored her mother. All she saw was her daughter’s braided head.

Nomakhwezi still seemed unsettled by yesterday’s episode. Asanda looked at her husband, hoping for a signal about how to approach her daughter. Madondo nodded, signalling that Asanda should speak to Nomakhwezi.

‘Good morning, my Khwezi,’ Asanda said to her.

There was no response from Nomakhwezi, whose head remained lowered.

‘Forgive me, please, my child. I shouldn’t have said all those horrible things,’ she said as she walked around her husband’s chair, yearning to benefit from her husband’s alluring presence, which usually enthralled Nomakhwezi.

Asanda seated herself between her husband and her mother. The family had breakfast in uncomfortable silence. Makhulu still didn’t acknowledge anyone around her or the food until Madondo announced, ‘I have a surprise for you all,’ with great enthusiasm. His good spirits and the word "surprise" immediately caught his mother-in-law’s attention.

Makhulu’s eyes were wide like those of an owl. The rest of the family noticed her reaction and were thoroughly amused.

‘As I was saying, since I am going to be honoured tonight at the president’s gala dinner for my contribution to youth development, and also uTata Nelson Mandela will be announcing my appointment as a Member of the Executive Council in Gauteng province, I thought I should treat my favourite ladies to a spa day.’

‘That’s wonderful, Baba,’ Nomakhwezi said with the biggest smile. This sight pleased her mother. Asanda’s face lit up in appreciation for her thoughtful husband.

‘Once you are all done with your breakfast, please join me at the cottage where our masseuse awaits us,’ Madondo said.

He got up and went through the glass kitchen door framed in mahogany aluminium, stepping onto the Tuscan patio and the perfectly manicured grass that seemed to stretch on forever. In the near distance stood the open-plan cottage where the family entertained their guests.

Today, a group of four young Asian women came to pamper them. Two wore white linen pants just above the ankle and short-sleeved shirts with black Chinese collars. The other two were acupuncturists dressed in white lab coats. The therapists had their hair neatly tied in high buns, with not a single strand out of place. They wore Russian red lipstick and a light pink rose blush on their cheeks.

The cottage featured two portable massage beds covered in crisp white cotton sheets, with neatly folded cream-white towels placed on the necks of each bed. A sparkling clean silver tray sat on the left side of each bed, holding sterilised needles for Madondo and Asanda, who were receiving acupuncture treatments.

Across from the massage beds were two cream massage chairs that radiated comfort. Between the two chairs was a round coffee table with an array of nail polishes, massage oils, and various fragranced shrubs for the ambience.

Beneath the chairs were wooden bowls of warm water infused with essential oils and decorated with peach rose petals. The therapeutic water, prepared to soak Nomakhwezi and Makhulu’s feet, had a relaxing scent. Around the room, carefully placed fragranced candles set the atmosphere for the special treatment. Calming Asian music serenaded the experience with a holistic sense of relaxation. This memorable experience deeply intrigued Nomakhwezi.

The family spent the day enjoying the pleasures of the unforgettable surprise.

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The evening had officially come, and Mr Madondo wore a tailored navy-blue suit with a white shirt, a light grey tie, a grey pocket square, black leather shoes and sat on a dark grey velvet sofa at the foot of their king-sized bed. Madondo was always looking dapper.

‘*Ndlovukazi yami enhle*—my beautiful queen- we are going to be late,’ Madondo pleaded to Asanda, who was still in the walk-in closet sitting on a round navy-blue velvet seat in her white personalised bathrobe.

‘*Sthandwa sami*—my love- you are an hour and thirty minutes ahead of time. Can we not be the first ones at the venue? Please, my love, you are being honoured tonight. And didn’t your Mama teach you never to rush a woman while she is enhancing her natural beauty?’ protested Asanda with charm.

Nomakhwezi was sitting on her mother’s make-up table with her legs crossed in front of the mirror. She entertained herself with her mother’s blush brush, which she stroked from her cheekbone to her hairline.

‘Mama, what dress will you wear tonight?’ asked Nomakhwezi.

‘The navy one to match your father; I don’t want to steal the lime-light,’ Asanda proudly responded.

‘No, Mama! Wear the red dress; you will surely stand out in that dress.’

‘I can’t, *nana*—baby—I will wear that dress when the occasion is about me. Tonight is your father’s special night,’ said Asanda.

‘Mama, what do you always tell me?’

‘For as long as you are above ground, it’s a special occasion,’ they said harmoniously.

‘You are right; let’s get the red dress,’ she said enthusiastically.

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Madondo was downstairs in the foyer, patiently waiting for his wife. Nomakhwezi ran down the stairs and jumped into her father’s arms. She wrapped her arms around her father’s neck and whispered, ‘You must tell her she is gorgeous.’

But there was no need for her to advise him. Asanda looked like a rose refreshed by summer rain and the sun’s glow. She radiated in her long red tulle evening dress; her braids tied neatly in a high bun.

‘Makhulu!’ Nomakhwezi called out loudly towards the family room. ‘Come and see Mama.’

Makhulu walked in just in time to witness her daughter descending the stairs like a princess in a fairy tale.

‘My child, you look exquisite,’ Makhulu complimented Asanda.

‘Thank you, Mama.’ She smiled at her mom.

She walked towards Madondo to greet him with a peck on the lips.

‘To this day, you still make me nervous,’ he said with his head down.

‘Don’t be silly,’ she said with a heartfelt smile.

‘Timeless; that’s what your beauty is... timeless,’ Madondo told her.

‘Nana, come to me,’ Makhulu said to Nomakhwezi.

Nomakhwezi slid out of her father’s hands and rushed to her grandmother’s side.

Asanda took Madondo’s hands, placed them in hers, and stared into her husband’s eyes.

‘I am so proud of you, *sthandwa sami*—my love. You have worked hard to give us the life we could only dream of. Now I get to watch the nation honour your achievements.’

‘*Ngiyabonga, ndlovukazi yami enhle*—thank you, my beautiful queen. We must go now,’ he said, looking at the timepiece on his right wrist.

‘What is the rush? The venue is fifteen minutes away. Let’s take it all in and allow your soul to be in the moment, my son. Look at where you are, both of you. All the kindness and mercy you have gifted our people is choosing to honour you tonight. Wait, don’t you two dare go anywhere? I have the perfect idea,’ said Makhulu.

At that moment, Nomakhwezi could see her father release the physical tension on his shoulders and celebrate his journey to this point. She smiled at her father, appreciating the peace that hedged his presence in the room.

Makhulu whispered in Nomakhwezi’s ear, suggesting she play *Ndi-Phendule—Answer Me*—by Letta Mbulu and Caiphus Semenya on the record player. This song had always been a favourite of her parents, instantly filling them with delight. It captured the joy and playfulness of their love story. At that moment, it symbolised the indescribable beauty of two people coming together in love and purpose, proving that anything is possible.

As the song played, Madondo and Asanda danced to the rhythm of a tune that encapsulated the sweetness and mystery of the journey to a successful marriage. Nomakhwezi watched as her parents embraced, swaying side to side, softly singing along. From the sidelines, she joined in, her heart filled with the same love and passion for South Africa that

her parents had always nurtured. Their infectious spirit and appreciation of selfless patriotism marked her at a tender age.

After Madondo and Asanda sang the first verse to each other, a black Mercedes-Benz E-Class pulled up in front of the main door, driven by her parents' driver. Nomakhwezi stood by the doorway, watching her mother and father drive out of the driveway as the song's chorus played in the background.

The car stopped in front of the main gate, waiting for it to open. Asanda, seated in the back with her husband, turned back to look at Nomakhwezi, who stood alone. She blew a kiss towards her daughter.

When the gate finally opened, the driver turned right into the furthest lane from their house, just as the lights of a speeding shuttle bus blinded him. Nomakhwezi heard the screeching brakes as the bus driver slammed on the brakes, making an uncomfortable skidding sound on the tar road.

With deafening impact, the bus crashed into the right side of the Mercedes-Benz, where Madondo was sitting. The saloon car flung across the street, coming to a sudden stop against the trunk of a tree.

The force of the impact caused Asanda's head to crash through the left window, pitching almost half of her upper torso out of the vehicle. Still standing in the doorway, a scream was let out by Nomakhwezi at the top of her voice as she ran towards the already-closed sensor gate. Makhulu exerted baby steps as she ran.

'Mama!' Nomakhwezi wailed, her arms outstretched through the gate like she expected her mother to pick her up.

She could not see her father from her angle, and all she got was a full view of the lifeless body of her mother.

What made this devastating introduction of pain into Nomakhwezi's life so gut-wrenching was that, while she was screaming for a response from her parents, the chorus of the song could still be heard playing in the background. The words *Ndi-Phendule*—Answer Me—kept repeating in the song.

'Baba, help Mama!' she screamed, shaking the gate to open.

'Nomakhwezi, move. I need to open the gate,' a shaken Makhulu said to her.

Nomakhwezi did not seem to hear her.

'Please move, my child!' she pleaded with her.

Nomakhwezi stepped away from the gate, and as soon as the gate opened enough for them to pass through, they dashed to the car.

Nomakhwezi ran to her mother and held onto her bloody fingertips that peeped through the broken window. Flashing blue lights approached the scene. Nomakhwezi was picked up from her waist by a female officer in uniform, who immediately removed her from the heart-wrenching scene.

*20th March, 1993  
Sandhurst, Gauteng Province*

Do you remember when my mother let slip a glimpse of her pain while shouting at me for something I didn't do? And how my father abandoned me as I took a verbal lashing for demons that were his, but somehow became mine? In hindsight, it was probably their soul's way of cutting the cord from me, like a wink from death, preparing me for unsolicited independence.

The sun still shines through the Madondo home, but this time, it feels like a test from God. What is the purpose of light if you are too blind to see it? Death left its reeking residue right in front of the gate, where two irreplaceable lives took their last breath. The home where joy held its meetings is now a tombstone for sorrow. The sun is still shining; it is as if someone forgot to tell it that today is a sad day; today hurts.

I just got back from the funeral service. I wore a round collar silk dress with a hemline that rose just below the knee, a sewn-in belt with a ruffled black rose, and black patent leather princess shoes.

I stood before my late father's record player in his office. Above it was a black-and-white family portrait of my parents and me, probably taken when I was six months old.

I pondered how my father had also been an orphan. He didn't even have a family portrait, let alone any remnants of his parents, to prove that he once belonged.

When he was eight years old, the village he lived in was burned to the ground by armed invaders. On that particular day, he had gone into the bush to gather medicinal herbs for his little sister, who had fallen while playing and scabbed her knee.

On his way back to the kraal, he saw the invaders setting fire to the

village huts and mercilessly gunning down his parents, his sister, and the rest of the villagers.

Desperate to save them, he tried to run towards the flames but he said a presence stopped him. Something unseen held him back, forcing him to flee into the fields, where he survived on his own for just over a month.

However, through a myriad of circumstances, my father worked incredibly hard to give me an opportunity to experience a family.

I took my father's Caiphus Semenya record and selected a song titled *Nomalanga*. Every time he played this unreleased masterpiece, our home vibrated with a deep reverence for the meaning of life. It was even more special because 'Nomalanga' was my middle name. In Zulu, Nomalanga means 'Lady of the Sun.' She brings hope for a better tomorrow.

So, I stood there as the song's noteworthy intro filled my father's office with his soul. I got lost in the moment, and I still could not comprehend what had been and was happening.

I was well aware that this was the end. No one needed to explain death to me. I saw it with my own naked eyes! How life in a red dress blew me a kiss goodbye, and how death just took a life's moment, then rewarded himself with my mother's head piercing through the rear window of a car.

That scene found a permanent home in my memory, entering intrusively like the spirit of darkness who took over my life.

I walked towards my father's office chair and sat in it. It was too big for me, but I quite liked it. Through a door left ajar, I watched my extended family, including Makhulu, who sat in the family room.

'Madondo and my niece took care of so many people. Who is going to take over Madondo's businesses, or my niece's design studio? Let's not fool ourselves; we know nothing about their work. Don't let your greed be the reason we can't walk with our heads held high.' Makhulu's older brother said, addressing the family.

He sat in a chair, gripping his home-carved walking stick. It was clear that they were arguing about my parents' estate.

However, my mother's forever-drinking eldest brother wanted to be in charge.

‘I will take over their estate since I am the eldest,’ he announced, as the foetid brew on his breath harassed the nostrils of those nearby.

The women rolled their eyes; and some pinched their lips in disapproval. But he seemed undeterred and went on.

‘Ladies and gentlemen, I must mention this: as the new self-appointed head of the family and by custom, of course, I will not stay in the suburbs. I don’t know their ways; none of us do. The women here are skin on bones. Surely, I will die of hunger,’ he said.

The men were annoyed with him, too.

‘We can’t sell this house. This is my granddaughter’s home,’ said the already emotionally drained Makhulu.

‘Forgive me, Makhulu. I sympathise with your pain, but we can’t maintain this house, let alone live in this community. We are like donkeys on the highway,’ said my mother’s eldest brother.

‘What about Nomakhwezi? Suburbia is her home, and you guys are trying to take the last piece away from her,’ Makhulu protested.

‘This situation is deeply saddening, my sister. Unfortunately, your son is right, we have no choice but to sell everything and let Nomakhwezi stay with you in the rural Transkei,’ said my Makhulu’s eldest brother *uTatomkhulu*—grandfather in isiXhosa.

*Twenty-three-years later*  
*13 March 2016*  
*Randfontein, Gauteng Province*

After the tragic loss of my parents, my life took a different turn. I walked around with a heavy hole in my spirit, an undeniable reminder of how deeply the loss of both parents can affect a child.

The consequences of being an orphan somehow qualified me to fight hard for the life I wanted. Beyond rising above the statistics that veil orphaned children, I simply wanted to fill that hole in my spirit with my accomplishments.

I worked incredibly hard under the duress of a cloud that hovered over me like a twisted halo, one that carried thunderous expressions of devastation. It projected onto me the belief that my parents could not rest in peace, given the grotesque manner in which they died.

For years, that cloud hypnotized me into believing they were still suffering, watching from behind an invisible vault where they were trapped. After all, how could they rest in peace when their nine-year-old child had no one but her aging grandmother? How could they transcend into God's will for the departed, knowing their daughter would face the world alone?

Even the rain felt like a message from them, a sign of their tears, mourning the struggles I endured, powerless to help. I carried that burden. But somehow, I fought. I fought for my sanity. I fought for my joy.

As a child, I pushed through blood, sweat, and tears. I was unwavering in my tenacity, determined to overcome every obstacle that hindered my path.

Eventually, I found a rhythm, a life shaped by bravery, diligence, creativity, and the rewards of love. And one day, in the cracks of my destiny, flowers of blessing suddenly bloomed. Just like that.

With every gift God bestowed on me, all I ever wanted was to make my parents proud, especially my mom.

And now, here I am: thirty-two years old, sitting in the passenger seat of a Rolls-Royce, wondering if it was all worth it.

# Transkei Again

*11 May 1996*

*Eastern Cape Province*

We moved back to the Transkei, where my mother grew up, a few months after my parents' passing. The family decided to sell my home and place the money in a trust for my education. I am twelve years old now.

*Uka Secondary School,*

*Mrs Soliswa's Grade 6 mathematics classroom*

'I don't understand the question, Mrs.'

'It's because you are a stupid girl! Now, where's your parent's money to buy you the answer? You are just like the rest of us. This is the motherland, girly. Catch up to it,' the teacher mocked me.

I just stood there, watching her lips shape the mockery aimed at me. Mrs Soliswa went on and on and on. Between you and me, I wasn't the least bit bothered. She quickly picked up on my disinterest, and that only made her more furious. She kept a branch from a thorn tree next to her desk. She used it to punish us, breaking off thorns and pricking our arms with them.

She called me to her desk. I looked her straight in the eyes as I approached, even though, in our African culture, it was considered disrespectful to look an adult in the eye. However I had this urge to figure out exactly what her issue with me was. I was innocently confused. For no apparent reason, she would single me out. She couldn't stomach the sight of me. As usual, she grabbed my arm and pricked it, six times.