

There's Another Story Here

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by

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Abstract

Written in fragments and combining fiction and narrative non-fiction, this novella explores how South Africa's history of violence and current violence against women affects and influences how women relate to each other. Based in the knowledge that our memories and behaviours are linked to the experiences of our ancestors via our bodies, I engage what our violent history and the disappearing myths that are still embedded in our bloodstream mean for life today.

Drawing on the experiences of several generations of women in my family, current affairs and the lives of women close to me, my novella picks at the fragile things that hold us together. I take influence from the prose poetry in Claudia Rankine's *Citizen*, and the use of fragmentation, myth and biography in Lydia Yuknavitch's *A Chronology of Water* and Lily Hoang's *A Bestiary*, and use an amalgam of genres to ask how we hold each other; how we breath, create, love and dream.

We are heavy with so many stories. We are dying from them.

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These are the things of bruises and blood and breast-milk.

Of memory imbued in marrow and laden things like family, like feeling. Fallacies and fictions.

These are the things that the body absorbs. That transfer in platelets and haemoglobin hurt. That knot-up and build heavy monuments on the flattened soft of the shoulder-blades, pulling them up to the ears, head slunk low.

This is what we were given. Our anaemic inheritance - sour and sweet and rheumy, a line of fine fear trailing from the navel down. A faint line in brown splitting the forehead.

The body and its borrowed stories. A woman and a woman before her and the women before them.

See here the things of twilight hours and a new-born baby in a bed, wedged in between two heaving bodies sunken with sleep, satin canary-yellow covers in a backroom in yard in Zola. It is early morning. The light is feather-weight wispy. It rollicks in playful rivulets, whispering through shut windows and it tumbles down and blots out; a double bed, three bodies horizontal in it. Another body upright next to them; the shadow of a woman who appears to be in some kind of uniform, a matching angular hat tipped to the right on her head. The baby, face wrinkled by amniotic fluid and hands balled up with slivers of placenta in the palm, hoisted into the air. Her head and neck cradled and secured, tiny body held up against a fleshy chest in a way that there is no word for in English... ukufumbatha.

The woman holds the child, coos, cuddles, hums something indistinct - the notes undulating raspy and wet in her throat. She is the result of a love so forceful it has made death just another thing to conquer. A smaller death. A death that can be broken into its parts and meted out piece-by-piece and allocated appropriately. A bleeding out, a raspy breath, a death rattle one day. Another day, blood gone blue, the body stiffened. Rigor mortis. And over a few more days the weakening of the twisted bonds that hold soul within skin. That hook a person in one world, or the next. They say it smells like lavender, the moment a spirit leaks free from its shell. She plays with the baby girl and fills the room violet. She gives it her names. She spins with it slowly, holds it up to the light and lets the airy amber baptize. She rubs the moist from the baby's chest and sings to it the songs of forever. Nursery rhymes for the shadow-life.

Songs of the in-between. Her voice is like frozen rivers; it twinkles and falls to the floor in shattered crystal.

The mother of the baby girl lies in the bed, silky yellow to the neck, awake but pretending not to be. She squints through furrowed eyes, stills her movement, her breath, the thundering of her heart. She listens to the breaking, the stalactite fracturing into sharp angles. The dead woman playing with her child. Amutekethisa.

*

The house is four-roomed bungalow in the middle of a street the leads to the public clinic in one direction, and a dry veld, a rubbish heap and the mining hostels right at the back. It has a rouge roof that curves and hangs really low like fringing. Two bedrooms that receive little natural light, a living room that faces out onto small patch of grass, a scatter of aloe to ward off evil eyes and cursed tongues, and a large oak tree that constantly bleeds sap, and then the street. The kitchen in the back has one those doors that open separately on the top and the bottom, and when the top flap is swing out, it opens out onto a garage that has been extended and converted into two outside bedrooms, and next to that, a small concrete and brick cubicle.

If they found her body, it would be in the outside toilet behind the house, behind the back room, a dog leashed to the wall separating this house from the next. A one metre by one metre compartment with those old-school black-and-white cisterns that flush by chain. Perhaps she thought the cramps would pass when they first gripped her, tissue pulling away from the inside. And she tossed and turned and kicked, and tossed the covers off, bucking at them where they tangled and caught her at the ankle. Maybe she stumbled to the kitchen for glass of water - hand holding her stomach in - when a wave of pain like a cold knife bent her over at the waist, one hand gripping the sink. She breathes. Slow. Tries to control it but it sucks in ragged-like, crashing over invisible jagged edges and raised rocks. Maybe as she put the glass on the counter, it tipped over the edge and the water pooled around her feet, washing over her toes, the webs of her feet, diluting the blood spilled down her legs. Would this be the first time she noticed it? The Blood. Stopped low to wipe up the mess and seeing a red that should not be there. This is going according to plan, she thinks. This is the plan, she thinks and she can no longer hold her stomach down. She stays low on the ground, drags herself on knees, on palms out the kitchen, out the kitchen door, crawling on cement to outside bathroom.

*

I walk into rooms and women cry and men cry out.

If you are struggling to imagine this heaviness, picture yourself standing naked in large cylindrical room that is slowly filling with the tears of the people of you love. They gawk at you, point, cry. You lift your arms above your head as the water rises, spinning slowly for inspection, gulping at the saline water when it starts to reach chin level.

*

These are the things of gossip disguised as cautionary tales. Conspiratorial tongues curling around scandal and shame. Whispered loud enough to infect us with the salacious. A story my mother once told me and no-one has repeated it since. Something in her eyes that had no place there. Something gleeful. The saccharine sweetness of the pain of others. We were in the car headed home, my shoes off on the floor of the vehicle, my one leg crumpled against the dashboard. It was hot then, the windows cracked slightly open and I sat in the passenger seat eating a sandwich I had packed for lunch while she sucked litchi juice out of a green and blue carton. I know my mother's side profile better than I know her face and its features. We are always next to each other, eyeing each other from the side rather than full on. If I had to paint her into immortality, it would be from this view. A beautiful half-woman with a sharp nose and a round dimpled cheek. She puts her car into gear and I watch the half-face turn to look out the window, become a full black curly afro and then a nose, an eye, a dimple again. "I mean, angazi, but that's what I heard." She shifts the gears back down into second, her wedding ring gleaming against the plastic. "I don't know. I don't think she was trying to kill herself. I think maybe she thought because she's a nurse, she could do it herself."

The indicators click, a mechanical heartbeat. I swallow hard a bolus of bread and tears and watch swatches of grey and grey smudge outside the window blurring my understanding. I look into my mother's eye and there something lightening sits that is too ecstatic. I look away and brush bread crumbs off my skirt as she presses down on the accelerator and lurches the car back into motion.

"Shame. Maybe she was embarrassed that she was unmarried and having another child. Maybe the father of the child was a married man. We didn't even know she was dating and then the next thing, she was dead."

We pull into the parking lot of a Kwik Spar and she opens the car door, tilts sideways and steps one leg onto tar.

“Are you coming with or are you going to stay in the car asking silly questions?”

*

When she was a teacher, my mother found fetuses swimming in toilet bowls and lodged in pipes and blocking drains. Water would flow out of tubing, bursting out, drowning the floors in faecal matter urine and fetus, flowing out of drains and into gutters, into streets, into classrooms. Her students drank boiled Coca-Cola with two dissolved aspirins to heave a stomach before it becomes. They drank bleach and vinegar and disinfectant to throw a stomach flat. They drank herbs in hot water to submerge a stomach bloated, and jumped from the top of cupboards, from ledges, from stairs, hoping to dislodge the stomach on impact. They stuck unfurled wire hangers up their vaginas and bled out into regulation uniforms, slumping spent under timber tables, crimson gathering in their leather school shoes.

*

In long drops; in communal outside toilets without doors; wrapped in plastic bags and thrown in illegal dumping sites for dogs to maul; in the dustbins behind the Methodist Church; in paper bags from KFC floating on an open sewer; thrown over the fence into the neighbour's yard; wrapped in two layers of cloth - muslin and something printed in coltish shapes and colours - in a green municipal rubbish bin outside a busy complex on Honeyguide Road in Douglasdale; in another bin at 7am in Weltevreden Park found by a man digging through the refuse for something to save, spare, upcycle; in a Sasol dumping site amongst industrial waste; at a home for “battered women and unwed mothers”; wrapped in lined Exam Paper outside the back fence of Elandspoort High School; on the corner of Adam and Shilling in shoebox accidentally kicked open by a legal clerk running to catch the bus to work; at the station on top of cigarette butts and torn ticket stubs; in a shopping bag searched when the 17 year old carrier was suspected for shoplifting; in a coffin with the body of a bishop; in a handbag.

*

My father is silent man. A quiet something brewing in chipped terracotta. A difficult thing to understand, to hold. We touch each other maybe six, maybe five times a year and I remember these moments by occasions that give them rise. Reason as impetus. A force driving us to recognise each other as blood and as needing. As equally human and hurt and warm somewhere underneath. As broken things desperate to patch up the leaks, we sometimes find each other awkwardly folded into a dead-limbed arachnoid embrace, the orotund weight of so

many limping years, a pocket of air anchored firmly between us. There is no circumnavigating it. No way of stripping time of its shadow. We drag these chains, wrapping them taut around our bodies, tucking them into the hems of pants and the sleeves of our selves.

We are not dead. Just dormant. At rest.

It wasn't always like this. We had more effervescent times; candied things in bright wrappers and other things chocolate coated. A snoring man passed out in the couch while his daughter stacks books and cushions on his undulating form. Birthday cards with hand-drawn illustrations on the inside. Before time armed us like this, a man and a woman on the opposing ends on history. It wasn't always how it is now.

He speaks very little about himself, stuffing his life into his children's. Stuffing his secrets into the hollowed-out calcium of clean, boiled bones.

Have you heard the one about the man, first generation in University, stuck in a car with his daughter and hoping to thaw the years carved in ice?

One night we're driving to a take-out place in an outlet mall to buy burgers with cheese and bacon. Just us in the car and the radio loud and the stars, shallow luminescence in the sky. I've come home from University for the first time and we're laughing, really laughing about jogging ghosts on Upper Campus and dining hall food. About the kid who said he saw the kitchen staff trapping pigeons in a cage behind the men's residence. About the rats scuttling on the roof and the woman in the laundry room banging on pipes and crying. Flickering the lights and blocking the pipes and crying. In the car, mirthful and full. There is word I once came across that I have never been able to remember, that slips from reach when I need it the most. A feeling so full that you are immersed in it, so abundant that it is an entire cosmology. The realization that in all the other colours smudging past, their tinctures trapped in your headlights, are moments this full and this complex. Other kinds of lives with other kinds happinesses in various metallic shades of iridescence, of grey, of indigo. In that car - in the metal and glass and hide – he unfurled a little.

He laughs and tells me about leaving for University, the first in his family. He's still laughing when he says he watched his friends pack to leave years before him, how he stayed and worked and saved. How he arrived on campus with just enough money for one semester, still laughing.

“You know, I got my first pair of pyjamas as a gift when I left for school. Of course, I never had pyjamas before. We didn't have money for those kinds of things.”

*

In the cubicle she sits on the bowl, head to her knees. Her arms are outstretched on either side of her to prop the walls up, to pull them down. The bones of her vagina are melting and something large, heavy and warm grows there. The waters escape from between her legs falling into the bowl loudly, the waters escape from her mouth, from her nose, from her throat in a scream. The pressure doesn't lessen. It builds and builds and keeps leaking. The walls had just been painted in an anorexic pink, but the older chalky green still lurks there in corners and glows through the thinner parts of the coat. She breathes quickly now, sits upright on the plastic seat and wipes her wet mouth with a page torn from the M-section of the Yellow Pages lying on the concrete flooring.

*

We drove home in silence, the food in a brown bag heating on my lap. My father's story dark, its contours shadowy in the back seat, in the rear-view mirror, blowing through the plastic air-con vents.

Maybe the word I'm looking for is Sonder. From the Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows. Noun. “The realization that each random passer-by is living a life as vivid and complex as your own – populated with their own ambitions, friends, routines, worries and inherited craziness – an epic story that continues invisibly around you like an anthill sprawling deep underground, with elaborate passageways to thousands of other lives that you'll never know existed, in which you might appear only once, as an extra sipping coffee in the background, as a blur of traffic passing on the highway, as a lighted window in the dark.”

*

My father locks himself in his study. A small room with oversized furniture and books from wall to wall. To walk in you have to really push the door, forcing your entire body's weight onto it. On the left are three bookshelves, two of them stacked one on the other. A large window looks out onto a gargantuan tree with branches leaning perilously over the room.

Every time it storms and a bulky mature branch thunders onto the roof, he promises Ma that he'll trim its boughs, but he never does. Above his desk, a masculine leather and mahogany thing and on the wall above it, another shelf, and on this shelf to the right, near the windows, an ancient edition of Encyclopaedia Britannica.

I was five or so, just starting school and bouncing between my aunts, my grandparents and my parents who had recently bought their first house in a middle-income suburb. They had planned our first holiday, saved for it, a trip to Cape Town over the long and scorching December Holiday. One day a white man comes knocking on their door. He's dressed in a suit, cheap polyester and ugly tan but its sharply pressed, neat and clean if not a little too long in the arms and legs. He says he has something for them, that'll change their lives and secure their daughter's futures. So they let him in and offer him, tea, coffee, juice, ice-cold water from the fridge. He sits on one couch and when Ma emerges from the kitchen, a tray in her hand, she sits on a navy-blue patterned seater next to my father, opposite the strange diminutive white man in their home.

He adds way too much sugar in his coffee. Ma watches as he hovers the teaspoon above his cup and then upends the sugar bowl into his brew, not so much measuring with the teaspoon as he is creating a diversion in the grainy stream. "A man who throws so much sugar into his tea is not to be trusted," she thinks. But she ties her tongue, dissolves two pills of sweetener into her cup. "I know you probably get a lot people knocking on your door." He loosens his tie, uses the hem of his sleeve to dab at pearls of sweat that are beginning to dew above his upper lip. "People selling Tupperware. People selling vacuum cleaners and all these miracle chemicals that clean impeccably and last forever. Huh," he snorts and turns to my mom, "a woman like you must know what I'm talking about. Surely you get people on this sofa everyday trying to sell you make-up and harsh perfume. Those things smell like air freshener." His laugh is forced but he keeps at, awaiting a reaction. Ma smiles as politely as she can muster, "I'm at work all day so I wouldn't know" she raises the cup to her lips. "But I can just imagine them wearing the threads of my furniture thin." He asks too many questions. Tells too many flat jokes. How many children do you have? One they tell him. A girl or boy. How old? In school? Which school? Ah, very good, very good. That's a very good school. "See, I'm a salesman, yes, but I'm nothing like the salesmen who have come here before. I'm not trying to sell you useless expensive things that you'll never use. What I'm here for is now is not for me. It's not for you. This is for your children." My father had been quiet the whole

time, barely attentive, laughing and making sounds in his throat whenever breaks in the man's soliloquy would allow. He snaps to and leans forward, resting his forearms on his knees. The man in the cheap suit unzips his luggage, pulls out a stack of large books and places them on the table with a thud, rattling the crockery. He points at things around the house, a framed painted landscape, a CD on the table, a newspaper next to him and then picks a book, labelled from A to Z, turns to the appropriate page and corresponding entry, and rattles off an impressive list of facts. "So now when your daughter asks for help with her homework, you never have to say that you don't know the answer." So they cancelled their holiday and bought a 12 book edition of the black and red Encyclopaedia Britannica. On the table is a filing cabinet and I'm flipping through files and books and loose blades of paper. At the bottom of a drawer, under greyscale scans of an ID book, a passport, is a hand-sized booklet with a navy-blue cover. Bits of the plastic chip off the cover, they cover my hands in scales. On the face of it, a gilded emblem, some embossed crest with two Springboks en-point. On the inside, two sheets from the back is a the "personal particulars/ persoonlike besonderheid" page.

Thulisile Khubeka

Zulu

Female/Vroulik

1955

A stamp marks the date of issue. Wavy lines swim over the page: over a picture of her face, over a signature (Director of Bantu Reference) in the corner. She stares into the lens unsmiling. Her hair is braided into a crown on the top of her head. Her full lips pursed against each other, tight at the edges of her mouth. She swallows secrets. She stares.

So this is her. This woman who, when I walk into rooms makes women cry and men cry out. I let my father's chair swallow me as I pore over the image, this stranger who has shadowed me, who sits hard on my cheekbones and sad in my eyes.

To recreate this moment, grab as much skin as can from under your jowls, pinching and tugging at until you feel it pop free. Gently, very gently, peel your face off, placing it on a flat surface in front of you. Now you ask yourself, "Do you recognise this woman?"

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Breathe, she reminds herself searching out for the strokes of green. A bubble, hard and sharp sits on her chest and rises slowly up her throat. Breath. This is the plan. This is what you wanted. She leaks life into the waters of the pink toilet in the back. More is demanded. She tries to get up, tries to steady herself. She places her forehead on the cool of the wall, tilts her head down, parts her legs further and vomits into a puddle of red that has begun to develop there. She turns around and slides down the wall, sits in the mess that is her. Her legs collapsed in red, in brown, in pink, in grey, in fleshy fatty white.

*

Another rumour, mostly unconfirmed. A portrait of the father as young man, maybe five, maybe six. He's all joints and dermis, knobble knee-caps punching their way skin. Piercing elbows bruising through his arms. There's a function of sorts and the all the adults are in their second-hand finest. They sit in the lounge talking loudly and drinking quarts of beer from coffee mugs, routinely adjusting their wigs. A woman in apron, his aunt calls the children in to eat. Three plates are put on the floor, one for the meat, one for the cabbage, one the pap. The children stand in a line to wash their hands and then sit in a loose round shape, the food in the middle. They roll their sleeves up their arms and dig the hands into the plates, mushing the pap to soften it and cool it, rolling it to balls and dipping them into the meat sauce. The young boy lifts a handful to his mouth, pops it in, and before he can swallow, is yanked to his feet by the scruff of his neck. His aunt's rough hands on his collar. "Hayi. Not you. I don't want my children eating with filthy you."

*

Luctipathy. Noun. A hollowness in your gut generated but blood sadness, of the pains that swim in your bloodstream that aren't yours. That are passed down the lineage from generation to generation.

There is a relatively new school of genetic study that exists as a kind of marriage between the arguments contrasting nature and nurture. While it was previously believed that epigenetic changes only occur during foetal development, pioneering studies are showing that molecular detritus from certain types of diet, exposure to chemicals and also trauma, can be added to DNA in adulthood.

This trauma can pass through DNA and genome, haunting the blood and brains of those that inherit it.

These stories should be told with kinder words. Words that allow the tongue to curl and unfurl around the contagion of history. To click soft against hard palates; to lick wet and flat and spread on the back of age-stained, crumbling teeth.

We are raging here, platelet against platelet. Each indented vessel a battleship warring the other in a starless night. Each secret calcifying and cancerous. Metastasizing confidentials splitting and growing, forming bumps on wrists and ankles, hard excrescence on the on the ridge of the spine.

I am telling you these things because I am toxic and dying. I am sick with the stories of others. Immortality is an infection. We survive here, if we do, debilitated and silent. I want to hold my poisoned lips to yours and shove my rotting tongue into the chasm of your mouth.

Start with Mother.

Start with her hair. How she wears it, a thick black halo floating buoyant above her skin. Describe her skin, it's colour, it's texture something like the smooth of rocks polished by flowing waters. Everyone says how beautiful she is. Say how beautiful everyone says she is. Insert an anecdote here. An ordinary tale to bring the reader closer. Mention her shoes, sensible but stylish. How she would bring them out on Sunday nights to buff the leather smooth like her skin. Humanise her. Glorify Her. Put Her on a pedestal and then smash that pedestal into tiny, angled pieces. Burn the fractured parts. Collect the powdery ashes while they are still hot, while they still hold heat in the palm of your hands. And then smoke them. Write about her one dimple on the left side of her face. The soft part on the top of her head. Start with your first broken woman. Your mother and how she beat the brokenness into you.

Become pliable. Become soft. Absorb the blows.

You are six. You are five. And the passageway is long and it always dark. And now your mother, her long legs are aimed at you, and you flying down the long dark corridor. Such a small, fragile thing.

You are in shock. You do not cry. You are in shock and then you cry. Beautiful, fragile small thing, now sailing through the dark and your mother, her skin, her beautiful face twisted in rage, her screams chasing you down the long passageway. You bounce on the ground like a rubber thing. No protruding. Just a thing small and elastic tossed up the ground, by the roof, by the walls.

You are here now, bouncing in between in-betweens. You are always feeling in long, dark corridors for soft landings. Or things that can stretch like elastic. Or things that are firm enough to hold with room enough to give. To let repel. To allow for a few seconds, flying.

Goistemang's and your mother were in the same society. So every other Saturday she would come, skin like mahogany and eyes like twilight. Goitse's mom was burst of things floral, perfume and aqua dresses with the petals of the rainbow splashed across them. They would drink tea that emitted no steam. They would laugh and Goiste would laugh and you would laugh but what was the joke again? They were happy. Everyone. Her mother re-applying her

lipstick, laying her hair flat and tight with gold and pearl pins. She would pour her legs into stockings, slip stockinged feet into barely high high-heels. And then would leave shutting the door behind them. You and Goiste would shut the door behind you. Giggling like the children that you were, pulling cartoon panties off and then discarding them a pile of pink on the floor. Goitse tasted like everything and nothing. Nothing and everything and you had to find it with your lips. You were twelve or so in your small bedroom with the alphabet pasted on the wall. The room, the first on the left in that long dark corridor.

Start with yourself. The first broken woman. Bouncing.

You were high that day.

One of those early days of summer in Cape Town but the sky got very dark, very quick. There were four of you in the house arranged in the lounge like a tableau and everything felt purposeful. Turgid with meaning, with intent like how Nolu didn't joined everyone else on the floor. She remained. Even as the tingling began, even when there were firework light shows on the tip of your nose, she remained upright. Head balanced not on her shoulders nor sitting on the top of her neck. No. Rather a continuation from the base of her spine, all the way up the vertebrae and tangled nerve-endings and through synapses and continuing past where her head ended, right up to the high white-washed chipped ceiling that you always wanted to paint but never got around to fixing.

*

There's another story here: the day you moved in and the bottles of beer and the bottles of wine and how strangely you'd all sat, the couch still facing the wall and the one chair here and the other over there and someone with their ass on your coffee table and boxes and boxes and boxes as foot rests, as tables, as walls. And then sometime in the night, you were alone with this guy you would never have let in your house ordinarily. And you were sitting, legs folded underneath your weight on the arm of the sofa and that guy was now bent angrily over you, hovering. Shouting and his spit landing on your face and his face something ... A clay sculpture; damaged when it forced it way through the earth. So ugly that it could only be art, and him so angry that saliva was running all the way down his body turning him into mud and he didn't care, didn't care that he was melting into something... And his spit landing on your face smelling like every single, bad decision he'd ever made and all the decay in his duodenum and him shouting, "Fuck you and your fucking ugly house and your fucking chipped ceilings."

It was hilarious.

*

There were five of you, and it couldn't have been summer because the sky got dark, very dark, very quickly and amongst the bodies; ten hands and ten arms and ten legs were blankets: one for each. And in one set of the ten hands was a mug with something steamy dancing around the mouth of it. And the hands, with tentacle fingers wrapped around the mug in a way that doesn't exist in English... Ukufumbatha.

*

You'd gone hiking that morning. Deer Park and rolling your body anti-gravity up the mountain. Hungover except you'd longed ceased giving that feeling a name. Your cranium shrunken too small to contain you. And if you moved with a suddenness it felt like the very matter, the very tissue of yourself would force its way through the fissures of your skull.

*

When a human infant is born, the skull, while it appears to be one large curved bone, is actually comprised of several, major plates. Two frontal, two parietal and one occipital bone held together by fibrous threads called sutures. The spaces in between the bones are called fontanelles and there are two of them. The anterior fontanelle is where the two frontal and two parietal bones meet. This is the soft part on the top of a baby's head, the one we're always warned to be careful off, to not touch.

The posterior fontanelle is where the parietal bones meet the occipital bones at the back. In normal childhood physical development, both these holes will eventually close up before or around the time a toddler turns two.

You suspect that your anterior fontanelle never disappeared. That your cranial bones never fused because you still have a hole on the top of your head and your "soft part" is still soft. Your mom has a hole on the top of her head too. Some physical trauma, she told you the story but you always forget it and what does it matter anyway? How you got your hole and how you she got her hole are two completely unrelated events. This is how she tells it. But you know that she gave you gave the hole in your head. In your blood. In your bones. In her breast milk.

When you fell. When you both fell. When she tripped. When she dropped you.

*

You have a soft part that is still soft and spreading. From a dent the size of a two-rand coin on the top of your head, it grows down the rounds of your skull, glides over the arch of your brow, slides down the incline of your nose, cupped carefully in the furrow of your lips and still falling. You are one big soft part getting bigger. Getting softer.

*

After hiking Nolu makes breakfast while you google: "Effects of Psilocybin". Psilocybin is experimentally used to treat anxiety and depression but also, psilocybin, has been known sometimes to cause anxiety and depression.

Psilocybin is a naturally occurring psychedelic compound that can be found in over 200 species of mushrooms. When ingested, it is rapidly converted by the body to psilocin, which

has mind-altering affects similar to LCD, DMT and mescaline. Effects include but are not limited to feelings of euphoria, hallucinations, changes in perception, a distorted sense of time and in some cases, adverse reactions such as nausea and panic attacks. You type: “bad shroom trips”.

There are people here who fall into holes, the shallow graves of their buried anxieties and here they are now, trapped with all of them, as alive as they were when they went in. In one story on some online thread, a guy who calls himself S begins to cry blood and the walls cry with him dripping blood and more blood and more blood and eventually the whole house is blood, and no-one else, no-one else knows how to breathe here, only S. Other people leave their bodies and don't come back.

Where is the fear here? You left and have been leaving your body since that first man who barged his way inside of you, unwelcome, uninvited. And how he stayed there. Leaving crude graffiti on the slick of your walls, biting chunks out of your womb when he grew hungry. How he could not stand to be alone, inviting his tribe here to join him. Here. Inside you. Where is the fear here? You can swim through the red thick. You can breathe in blood.

*

On the floor of the house you are now lying on your back and you can smell the gentle musk of you. You smell sweet and wild like fynbos and you take this smell with you to the mansion above your head. There are floors on floors, an automated wooden staircase all the way up. And there are many doors, and all of them are slightly ajar, and you walk through some and have conversations with men, white cloths swaddled around their waists. And there are doors behind these doors and behind one of them is the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Sitting there alone in the corner wrapped in thorns, and you back out this room because it feels like maybe you are interrupting something.

*

London is next to Nolu on the couch, and it definitely isn't summer because both of them are wrapped under blankets. And that's when he tells you, his voice coming from the pit of his balls, his voice coming from the construction site across the road from the house. He says: It feels like diving into a warm pool of water, but without the splash.

No. It wasn't summer. Nolu and her tentacle fingers wrapped around a steaming mug in a manner there is no word for... Or maybe the word is cradle. How you hold something fragile. How you hold it fiercely, tight in your hands so that it cannot drop. Loose in your hands so you do not crush it.

*

We were talking about sex.

Five bodies, arranged in the lounge. Three bodies on the floor in blankets and two bodies on the couch in blankets

And that's when he said it. That entering a woman feels like diving in a pool of warm water, but without the splash. And his voice came from deep inside him. So deep it was not him. From the pit of his balls. From the construction site across the road. It was only a few weeks ago but I can't recall what they'd torn down. I know they're putting up high-rise "lifestyle" apartments. There's a vinyl poster against the fence. Happy, smiling inter-racial couples drinking flat whites on balconies that look out onto the harbour. Where in Obs could one see the harbour from? Not from my house with the chipped ceilings. Not from the construction site opposite. And not from the drug den next door. Like diving into a pool of water, but without the splash.

*

And immediately I wanted to be a diver in warm water, and be warm water and be a splash. Wet. Tepid. So when the other bodies left to buy beer, and there were only two of us left under blankets on the floor. And I said to you "let's be warm water. Let's be without a splash a splash." So we put our hands in our pants. Your hands in your pants. My hands in my mine. My middle finger probing so slowly, so carefully as though my furrow, my frown, my smile were unexplored terrain. And you tentative like maybe your folds were faraway, were forever. And my index finger there too, pressure downwards, pressure pushing pressure to the side and then middle finger, exploring. A place we'd been before but a completely new map. Where is the hurt here?

*

It wasn't beer. We had beer. We had braai meat. It was weed they'd gone out to get and it wasn't three. It was two because the one (Nolu with her tentacle fingers wrapped around a choreography of steam) had already left. It was definitely weed. There is another story here. Two of the five (now four) were laughing about how Porgy confronted the weed guy in the Audi, and she gotten into the car and how the weed guy had driven around the corner with her inside and London had realised very slowly that perhaps it wasn't such a good idea to let Porgy drive off in an Audi with a weed guy nobody knew. And so he's chasing a weed guy in an Audi with Porgy in the passenger seat down Lower Main Road in Observatory. The two of them laughed, and then it was all four of us laughing, and then there was no more sex in the

air. Only a one-dimensional interracial couple laughing along with us with flat whites in their hands.

*

Your mother. She is one big soft spot getting bigger, getting softer. You suspect her fontanelles are gaping and hollow. That her bones, like yours, never fused.

The Sacrum is a three-sided bone at the base of a human spine. A concave, slalom-line triangle formed by the fusing of sacral vertebrae S1 to S5 that happens during the budding ages of 18-30. The sacrum articulates with four other bones. This means it forms a joint with four bones. The Sacrum provides support for the spine, accommodation for the spinal nerves and articulates with the hip bones.

Support. Accommodation. Articulation.

In women, it is wider and shorter and directed more obliquely backward, increasing the size of the pelvic cavity.

There are speculations as to why this fusing happens. Any bones that evolve to withstand extensive force will also be thick or will fuse together. Your mother's sacrum is fully fused now. Yours is not.

Sacrum, from the Latin os sacrum (holy bone), named this because it was the part of the animal offered in sacrifice or because of the belief that the soul of a man resides there. Or both.

Your mother's sacrum has fully fused and yours has not and you have in common, one dimple on the left cheek and a hole on the top of your heads and you know she didn't mean it when she gave that hole to you.

When she fell. When you both fell. When you tripped. When she dropped you.

To cradle. Or to hold in cupped hands.

I have stacked my sadness like bricks inside me. The bricks were outside, their own quiet weight in the corner behind the car, behind the bins. One by one I brought them in. Eight sadnesses to hold the mirror up, four on each side. One sadness to balance the broken bed base and one that only comes out on hot days, that props doors open, leaving everything slightly ajar. The sadness of being sad.

Many of my lovers do not love me but they entertain me all the same. We infect each other and call it complicated and call again in less than a week. The sadness of looking at art and discovering you are dead.

Jean Michel-Basquiat said he crossed out words to enable us to see them more. Words like ~~mother~~. Like ~~erown~~. Like ~~Blood~~. He uses money as magic. As symbol and conjecture. I have no lines carved into my body. No roots rubbed into the splits to protect me. I hold out the palm of my hands, the soles of my feet for you to finger the wounds should you find yourself doubting. Myself lacking. The sadness of God as a singular. The sadness of gods as plural. I cross out words so you can see them more. Words like mother. Like black. Like me. To protest my own erasure, I disappear. The sadness of stardust that lives like mud.

The isiZulu word for moon is also the word for doctor. The name of the sun is also how we call day. Drunk one night at a pub a Xhosa man tells me that I do not know how to speak to men because there is no such thing as a Zulu man. The isiZulu words for ancestors and for sleep are similar. Also, the words of music and healer. ~~Cross this out so you can see it more~~. There are bricks all over my house so that it does not float away in the middle of the night. One by one I brought them in and put them in cupboards, in corners, on carpets. I joke to a friend and say, “This is why I’m so good at ukushaya umuntu ngesitina.” My lovers are other people’s lovers but I entertain them all the same. The sadness of the sunken parts in pillows and beds long after a person’s scent has left.

The sadness of Mothers and daughters. We have in common a dimple on our left cheeks and a hole on the top of our heads. We are soft parts getting bigger, getting softer. I know that she gave me the hole in my head.

In her blood.

In her breath.

In her breast milk.

When I fell. When we both fell. When she tripped. When she dropped me.

The sadness of stories as celebrations of survival.

I built a house from the bricks called sadness when there was no more room here to keep them. I built it on top of a treasure of bones. An unmarked graveyard of stories. In the back by the bins behind the car. I dug a trench and lined it with solid things, dependable things like disappointment, reliable things like money and magic. They dry smooth and hard like cow dung. I lined straight-cut, flattened rectangular pieces, tessellating them into a complex matrix, a trestle tower falling upwards. And then the bricks from carpets, from cupboards, from corners. The bricks had gotten heavier and I now needed both hands to carry just one. So I borrowed a neighbour's wheelbarrow and piled them into its hollow, hungry belly.

The sadness of the futility of sadness. These bricks were the weightiest. I used them to construct the first layer of the house. The uselessness of feeling things, the uselessness of feelings.

- I was on the way to work one day, squeezed in the second row of a taxi and the wind skimmed over the Atlantic and the wind tumbled over itself, rolling down the mountain falling down rocking the 16-seater as it lurched to an abrupt halt on the Upper Main Road. My thighs pressed tight into each other, my bum scooted up to the edge of the set. There are police cars spitting neon-cobalt against the thick grey of the sky, the charcoal of the tar. A school backpack, green and yellow, is toppled over on its side on the white line of the road, one small school shoe strewn next to it. The other shoe peeks out from under a silver foil sheet, beige rubber soul and black upper. Twenty-two bricks.
- A woman has gone missing and a woman has gone missing and another woman has gone missing and another. Instead of cartons of milk we post their pictures on social media and retweet and share with little to no hope that they will be found whole. Names and ages and dates of birth. Complexions a variant on the gradient scale of brown. Hair shorn short, close to scalp or long sheets of black past their shoulders. Last seen on the way to school or work. Crossing Nelson Mandela Bridge at 1pm. Hailing a taxi, one finger impaling the air, in blue jeans ripped at the knees and shiny pink Puma sneakers. She smiles in the picture, camera angled above her head, her eyes opened wide. She is no longer alive. She has been shot by an ex-boyfriend. Bundled into an imitation Persian rug when she went to his house to fetch the rest of her things. She was dragged off the street in broad daylight, her pony coming undone as her head hit the top of the car door. Something sharp in her thigh, in her neck.

Something misty in her eyes. She was gagged with a torn t-shirt. She was strangled with seatbelt that smelt of armpit and sweat. Three hundred and Fifty bricks.

- One day I am home cleaning and praying. Hallelujah hot water and Handy Andy to wipe down the window sills dusty with the carcasses of flies and bees, thin hair-like legs knotted and bent upwards when I hear man's voice shouting "hello!" from the gate. He's in a red and purple jacket, one of those loud nineties waterproof get-ups and it's filthy. His face is twisted in... agony? And with one hand he leans onto the wall post and the other presses into his chest. He's not as old as he looks, this I can tell, and his face is marked with many years on the bottle, many brawls. His lips are tumescent, cracked and flaky. He sucks the words deep from his stomach and spews them out in a stammer. His name. His occupation, says he used to do this garden for the white people of this place. He moans and kneads tears out his eyes but they resist. Everything inside me bristles. My lungs clench tight and my blood starts to flow in the opposite direction. He pulls his shirt open and shows me where he stabbed himself. He tells about the overnight stay in Settler's Hospital overnight. And the other hospital in Port Elizabeth where his two-year old daughter is tucked into a miniature cot, hooked up to tubes and other plastic veins. Raped by a neighbour he says. "The doctors say she might live." 232 bricks.

Nokuthula Simelane, an underground ANC operative disappeared in September 1983, abducted by the Apartheid government's Soweto Special Branch. She was tortured between South Africa and Swaziland, and killed.

From the TRC Hearing.

- Coetzee: At that stage she answered the questions that we were putting to her.
- Chairperson: So basically it took two slaps in the face and she would be sufficiently intimidated and co-operated with you?
- Coetzee: That was the beginning.
- Chairperson: What did she do? Did she cry?
- Coetzee: I cannot recall precisely.
- Chairperson: Didn't she fight back?
- Coetzee: No, not after the arrest and not at that stage when she was seated in the car with us.
- Chairperson: Very well. So then if I understand you correctly, for the first week she was repeatedly assaulted?
- Coetzee: Yes, in my presence. I confirmed yesterday that she was assaulted by the other members as well. That this could have been possible.
- Chairperson: No, we will only discuss what you can give evidence about. In your presence during that week she was assaulted numerous times.
- Coetzee: Yes. I also addressed the possibility that I may have slapped her on occasion thereafter when the input questions were put to her but that was upon certain occasions.
- Chairperson: Yes. Those assaults during the first week, were they serious assaults?
- Coetzee: I have already stated that we bagged her, we hit her with a fist and we slapped her. There is a possibility that she may have been kicked, but at this stage I cannot recall.
- Chairperson: Yes. But was it serious?
- Coetzee: Yes, I would say to a certain degree.
- Chairperson: So it was a repeated assault?
- Coetzee: Chairperson a person had to be broken first in order to rebuild them thereafter in order to establish a situation of trust between the parties.

- Chairperson: So after that first intimidation in the vehicle she co-operated and then after that became difficult again?
- Coetzee: We handled her in various facets. She had a wealth of information with regard to persons whose photos were in the terrorist photo album, who had already been identified as a result of their external military training as well as information that she had heard, and information that she had gained from things she had seen, so there were many aspects in the table.
- Chairperson: But I am asking you what her reaction was when you had her on the farm, in the middle of nowhere in a single room, with a whole big group of you, did she not co-operate?
- Coetzee: No. She co-operated. She co-operated to such an extent that we gave her the pen and paper to write with.
- Chairperson: Very well. Regardless of that these assaults took place consistently during the first week?
- Coetzee: Yes.
- Chairperson: And they were serious?
- Coetzee: Upon various occasions in the first week of her presence on the farm, yes.
- Chairperson: And serious enough that you would be prepared to describe it as torture?
- Coetzee: I would put it that way.
- Chairperson: So you tortured her for a week?
- Coetzee: Yes. It boils to that.

Yes, it boils down to that. I would put it that way. That is an accurate description. We had to break her. She had to be broken in order to rebuild. Yes, I would call it torture. Yes. Torture. She co-operated with us to such an extent that we gave her the pen and paper to write with.

It is the female Moorland Hawker Dragonfly that plunges from the sky, playing dead on impact with the earth, to avoid unwanted sexual attention from males.

In the oceans, female Bottlenose Dolphins and common porpoises have developed an extra fold over their vaginal openings, allowing them to control what male dolphin penetrates and impregnates them.

We who have yet to learn this, to play at death or to ossify, to become mute or silent, we die here.

Here the children play like they do, running through the hardness of that building abandoned and disused for years now. It's late afternoon and the hours of day are dimming. Look how they smile, look how their arms are wild in the air, rotating propellers, mini hurricanes and happy, throwing small stones at each other. Look, something bundled in the corner that wasn't there before. The body of a woman, pants around her ankles. No shoes but one long lace threaded around her neck. A plastic bag over her head.

In an alleyway in Tsakane in Johannesburg, in shallow ditch close to KwaThema Taxi Rank, just down the road from Bar Lounge. 9 am on a Sunday morning and we are in our two-piece outfits and floral dresses. And we're in sharp-toed heels and we've combed our hair and pulled it into gelled buns. We tuck bibles under our arms, lodge them safe in the crook of our armpits and the air is stewed meat and pumpkin with cinnamon and perfumes that smell like all the seasons. Sunday morning Noxolo, and your head knocked out of shape, and your eye sockets empty, and your brain puzzle pieces. A bottle of beer, brown forced into your... and a used condom found in your... and a brick on the pavement, used to break you down. Yes, I would call it torture. We gave her the pen and paper to write with.

"I'm not sorry," says Themba Mvumbu after being arrested for his participation in the gang rape and murder of Banyana Banyana footballer Eudy Simelane. Gang-raped repeatedly, stabbed twelve times before she died, succumbing to her injuries. Taking turns, they say, like they waited politely in line to force obliteration in her, and then drain it out with twelve uneven puncture points.

"I'm not sorry."

In one of the pictures that circulate on social media, she has her hair back in cornrows with a braided pony, sunglasses resting on top of her head. Her eyes look down, to a phone, to a book, away from scrutiny.

Former Lover says he disposed of her body. Not kill, he says, just dispose. Former Lover says he burnt her using a tire and petrol and pool acid. Former Lover says, "I was not thinking straight at the time." The time being when he threw her body into a wheelie bin, doused her in acid and petrol and stuffed her in a tire and set her alight in ditch in Bramley where her charred remains would be discovered by a passer-by.

Smoke. The smell of black rubber melting. Fibre catching alight, singed and spreading burning holes in ... and hair contracting into one mass until it becomes skin and skin becomes bones and becoming becomes...

Not Sorry.

My first layers of sadness are packed tight and straight. I'm wearing overalls I bought for an exhibition and performance many years ago and I'm squatting next to my newly formed structure, a spirit-level balanced on top of it. Some of the sadnesses jut out awkwardly, I use a rubber-coated mallet to bang them into place.

To hold the bricks together I mix one-part cement, two parts sand and four parts of something gritty like gravel and white lies. I use the new life I have poured myself into, an ill-fitting shallow experience that fits too tight around my frame. All these dry parts must be mixed thoroughly in the large bucket or wheelbarrow before any water is added. The exact amounts and ratios of which will depend on the size of the structure and the quantity and quality of the sadnesses. Using a spade, I make a crater in the centre of the cement mixture in the belly of the wheelbarrow. I pour water into this indentation and stir until I have formed a thick paste of even texture. The mixture is adjusted as necessary. The blending of these kinds of things is mostly from the wisdom of experience and also trial and error. The sadness of looking at art and discovering you are dead.

- When looking at Carrie Mae Weems' "Kitchen Table Series" I think: My umbilical cord might have been tendon and trauma and fibre and fear. I will have to find where mine is buried.
- Depicted in Nolan Oswald Dennis' "Radical Empathy" is a four or five-headed humanoid creature of many arms, many legs. Or maybe, many beings, one atop the next, layered on top of one another, creating one mass out of many. Or maybe just many pieces of many people. Maybe just waiting to be put together. The lines seem to breed and birth one another. A crooked limb, bent at the elbow. Or maybe a million. One leg. One curved line, hinged outward at the knee. Or maybe a million. The faces look as though they are at rest, perhaps caught in a moment of prayer. Some of the arms point up and out, some reach towards the mass being in the centre. Supplication and surrender. Embrace and empathy. In the centre, the lines and limbs over-lock, entangle. I imagine at each intersection, at every point that the lines touch and cross each other, a negotiation. A confluence. Tenderness and the moments of sentimentality we cannot afford to allow ourselves. I have traced this image many times. On the carpet, under the table, in a dark there that feels like my soul. The arms are folded in prayer and you are prostrate and one

maybe one of the limbs might reach me. From the mass I pick one figure and she will be mine. I pry her eyes open. Whisper into her into these things:

I made you and I love you but I do not have the words for love and loving. I do not have the words for the words I do not have.

- In a video titled After He Left. Athi Patra-Ruga's character Beiruth walks through the flat light, industrial yellow and concrete of the taxi rank. She in white fish-net stockings and a reddish onesie rigged to flicker with the colours of the spectrum. From somewhere, an external diegetic voice asks, "You're tryna fuck me?" With the onesie belted around the waits, she stands, splayed hard against the wall of the Universal Church, the blue of the crucifix above her bouncing off her helmet. She stays ready for the eventually, of having a man try to crack her skull in one day. She has a hole in the top of her head, or she is avoiding one. Are you trying to fuck me?

Tladi, Soweto. Obscured partly by a large rock, a woman half-naked and dead in an open veld, discovered by community members who had gathered to cut the long, over-grown grass sprouting along the railway line. Three weeping gashes in her neck. Three large stones near head. Bloodied. Lerato Moloji wears a gown, there by her rock. A patterned thing in three colours; red, black, blue.

Also Tladi, Soweto. A man, 37, turns gun to self, puts nozzle to temple, pulls trigger, blows brains over house, over a 31-year-old girlfriend held hostage for hours, wounded by fist, by bullet. A bed and other furniture blocks the entrance. Residents, police, ambulances pile up outside, bullet pyrotechnics rattle throughout the house. The windows shatter and the doors take on different meaning.

At the Springs power station of a government parastatal, a woman is found dead in her office after friends and family report her missing. For two weeks they look, her car still parked in the lot outside Eskom.

Mpumalanga. A young cattle herder leads his cows through an open veld at Manyeveni Trust, Kabokweni, when he detects a smell, putrid, putrefying, and follows it to its source. The smell gets stronger as he nears it, the cows behind refusing to get any closer and he sees protruding from the ground, something that appears to be human body parts. Thembelihle Base is 24 years old when she is reported missing, and in the picture that is published along with the news reports she's in brown and yellow school uniform, standing in front of a fence made of logs and stones. After the boyfriend is arrested, his house is torched and the roof collapses and the walls fall and crumble until...

The Sydenham SAPS have opened a _____ docket after the body of 30-year-old _____ is found on side of the N2 North, Spaghetti Junction by a passing truck driver. The body has a single gun-shot _____ to the upper torso.

The decomposing body of a woman – believed to be the much lauded _____, _____ – has been found on Table Mountain, crumpled away from the main trails. She disappeared two months before the discovery of the body while hiking up the mountain with her family on Human Rights Day.

My house is not a house as much as it one large segmented room. The more malleable sadnesses I use to partition what will later become a bathroom, a bedroom and a kitchenette. I only build three of the outer walls from scratch, leaning them against the wall that cordons my property off from my neighbours. I hear them scream at each other through the night. Hear things breaking against windows and faces and so I know their walls are built of sadness too. For the kitchen I use the sadness of mothers and daughters.

- I am sitting on the wing-back; she's lying on her side on a brown leather four-seater. Or she is upright on the wing-back and I am prostrate on the couch and when that man appears on the screen, and I stifle and swallow a scream but it stays there in my throat like a threat. Like a boulder in your oesophagus or that thing that comes some nights, slinking into my bed to sit on your chest, to keep me paralysed. The night that I told her that the man on the screen was also the man on top of me. And that he forced me down and was also inside you, saying "If this isn't what you wanted then why are you here?" I am sitting on the wingback and she's lying on her side, or I am lying on my stomach and she is upright on the chair and we are both crying when she tells that a man who was a family member, did that to her too. A woman and a woman before her and another woman too. 999 bricks for intergenerational trauma.
- One afternoon in the kitchen I slide a cup of coffee across the kitchen island and place next to it, a jug of milk (warm) and pill box dispenser of sweeteners. Mother is talking like she always does, her motivational word of the day, the traffic on Louis Botha, the fabric she bought at Fatima's on sale, the disturbing text she received this morning. "we must pray," resolves. "we must always pray." And then, as if it were someone else's thought transmitted into her brain, a cross-line or a wrong number, she looks dead into my eyes says "there are too many of us walking the streets sick. Too many of us are sick here," she points to her head, "and we don't even know it." I cannot tell if this is a confession or an accusation. 145 bricks.
- The holes in our heads and our cheeks. 12 bricks.
- I walk out of the house and she's there, Mother, with her shoulder-blades against the cold of the wall. And her chest rises and falls in uneven intervals and her breath is short is laboured. With her eyes closed and her chin tilted up, she wipes tears from her cheeks and

steadies her breathing. Stops the tears. I back away slowly, quietly before she can open her eyes. 6 bricks.

- When she kicked me down the passage for throwing up in her car. When she punched me in the stomach for burning cabbage. When she found a condom in my wallet and called me every kind of slut under the sun. 3 bricks. 3 bricks. 3 bricks.

In the lounge, I build a hearth for a fireplace. Fireplaces feel like permanence and home. I make it a perfect square, with one of those rounded arches in the middle and a rounded metal chimney, a perfectly spherical cylinder grows from its flattened brick top. To create arch, one must trick the bricks into staying in place by placing another layer balanced on something flat under them. I buy a grate from a second-hand place on Main Road and slide it into the hearth and next to that, what a rotund man behind the counter described as “truly vintage pokers”. Warmth and fire is the sadness of God as a singular. The sadness of gods as plural.

- God punishes me for who I am but He made me in his likeness. Everyday I ask forgiveness for the sin of self and pay penance by denying myself pleasure. I have my coffee black only allow myself a pinch of seasoning in my food. I put pinches of salt on windowsills, in bathwater. I carry salt in the lint-lined pockets of my pants. I write prayers in the back of my hand and on the pink of my palm and cover my mirrors with sheets because vanity is a sin. Because there in the mirror something is trying to get out. 72 bricks.
- In a church we're visiting, in the yard of a crèche, a woman in heeled sandals too small- her cracked heels hang off the back - catches the Holy Spirit and falls backwards onto a toddler playing with a piece of paper on the floor. The child flies backwards on impact and goes crashing into a chair, too stunned to cry. We're asked, not politely, to leave the church when we burst out in laughter.
- On the banks of the nervous river that slides reluctantly down the decline of Deer Park, a woman sits hunched in the mud gathering water in 2 litre plastic bottles with their labels peeled off. She startles a bit when she sees us and then quickly composes herself, pulling on the blue and white shirt of her congregation. She takes an empty bottle and holds its vacant body, its gaping mouth under the flow to drown it, twisting a red cap onto its full and placing the bottle next to her, next to another bottle and another bottle. In our Lycra tights in garish patterns we collect on the other side of the river, smiling at her as we hold submerge our glass bottles in the cold until there is no more room for the void within them. A woman runs past us and stops five metres away, bending to unleash her Golden Labrador from its leash. She stretches, swaying quickly from side to side, adjusting her corporeal weight from one hip to the other

while dog runs into the river, lifts its right hind leg into the air and pisses into the stream.

Farm labourers on the way to work in the early hours of the morning. The body of woman, between the ages of 25 and 35, lying on the side of a road near the Kameeldrift Plot in Tshwane. The _____ woman has two gunshot _____ to her upper _____, ripping holes bordered in red through a black shirt and a blue jacket.

In Wynberg, Cape Town, a 44-year-old woman is found on the red stoep of her home with several stab wounds to the entirety of her body, face down and legs spread far apart. On the red stoep red drops and on the pillars of the house red drops and on a pot plant at the entrance. And on a staircase on the inside red drops and the whole house red drops. The whole house crimson. A neighbour who heard her screaming and discovered her dead spreads a blue and green polka blanket over her. The police who arrive later spread a foil sheet over that. She has no shoes on, and peeking out under all these layers, her feet wrapped in black and red socks.

On everything, red and everything spread far apart Legs
Blankets screaming in the night

Appledene Road, Athlone Cape Town. The body of 18-year-old Leah Merchant is found in the back of a house, mouth stuffed with sand and pants pulled down, bunched around _____. The 23-year-old man arrested for the crime; raping, strangling and murdering her will later be released due to lack of _____.

Khayelitsha, Cape Town. The naked _____ of 19-year-old Sinoxolo Mafevuka is discovered _____ and spread- eagled, head stuffed into the bowl of a public toilet one hundred metres from her home. Last seen heading to the toilets in Blowey Section. Clothes found crumpled, torn, stuffed there. A jersey, long-sleeved and powder blue found at the scene links two _____, 21 and 28, to the crime. The accused, cousins of Sinoxolo's boyfriend, went on a rampage two days before her _____, threatening to assault her for allegedly seeing another man. An informant in the case is recovering in Tygerberg hospital after being stabbed in the neck by Sinoxolo's boyfriend.

Jouberton Extension 7, Klerksdorp. After noticing the “strange actions” of a stray dog, a neighbour dumping garbage finds the charred _____ of Nombuyiselo Nombewu two hundred and thirty-six steps from her home. The Friday she disappears is grey, wet. The 15-year-old walks through the icy chill to borrow R50 from a _____ for electricity. A few hours pass and doesn't return, so her grandmother sends her twin siblings to look for her. 8pm and still nothing, so Gogo sends an older sibling who while looking, will have a conversation with the man who will later be arrested for Nombuyiselo's murder.

Incinerated. Smouldering markers in a field. Her hair plaited straight back. Her earring. The remains of the umbrella she'd been carrying. “They burnt my granddaughter like a dog”.

After boarding a taxi on a Friday evening, friends Bongeka and Popi disappear only to be discovered _____, one woman in Tladi and the other in Naledi. Both appear to have been raped and the _____ gun shot wound to _____ parts of the body. Tladi residents claim to have witnessed a suspicious _____ following a woman and the blasting of a _____ being fired. In a photo published by a news site, a woman in blue skinny jeans and green top lies face down, half on her body in a ditch, long black hair obscuring the _____ her head.

8pm on a Friday evening. A 13-year-old girl is abducted at gunpoint while walking down Robert Sobukwe Road, Nyanga. Ten men took turns raping her in at least three different locations over four days, taking turns assaulting her and holding her down. That's what the newspaper report states "taking turns". As if they waited politely in line, please and thank you's while battering effacement into her _____, and then _____.

A 26-year-old man was arrested after his girlfriend and mother of one, Avuyile Jamjam was found _____ to death and _____ in a field in Athlone. She had previously _____.

I decide to make the bedroom a few stairs lower than the rest of the house, digging deep into the hard clay earth to lower its foundation. With my shovel, I scoop out small bottles with razors and rusted nails cutting the stomachs of the coloured glass vials. With my shovel, I scoop out and discard, half bodies of earthworms still writhing in the soil, whole bodies of earthworms slaloming in the dirt, half a red brick, the pink shrunken shoe of toddler. And bones and bones and bones and bones. I build the levels going down short and wide so that the place I sleep can be sunken. The sadness of stardust that lives like mud.

- ITokoloshe is described as a dwarfish mischievous spirit creature. In the Daily Sun headlines, it steals food and alcohol; taking bites out of newly bought polony, or moving keys and hiding clothes; and slamming doors and just watching. Watching. In more harrowing stories, the tokoloshe rapes indiscriminately. In the Vice Documentary, “The Ghost Rapes of Bolivia”, members of a Mennonite Community in Manitoba Colony believed that demons were raping the town’s women and children at night. How else would they explain waking to semen and blood and rope-burn on their wrists and blinding head-aches that dug canyons in their memories. Tsietsi in Palm Ridge, East Rand: a 60-year old woman has not cleaned her shack in around seven years. Somewhere in here is a document with a case number printed on it stating that she was drugged, robbed and raped. And while a visit to the doctor confirmed that her and her grandchildren had been raped, the police have not been back since taking her statement in 2009. She has not cleaned the house. She is preserving the crime scene. “They told me that I will get thrown behind bars if I tamper with the scene.” In Bolivia, the demons were a group of men ages 19-43 who’d used a chemical used to anesthetize cows to drug whole families and rape them.
- After that lover broke my finger he lay in bed crying while I rocked him to sleep, stroking the prickly fuzz of his head with my other hand.
- As per the suggestion of a sangoma, I light a candle everyday and place on red and white patterned piece of fabric next to two handfuls of rolling tobacco, a violet bottle of perfume with a gold cap, and sparkle of silver and gold coins. “It’s for your protection,” she says. One night I am the phone and I can see from over the folds of the bed, the candle’s flame jumping wildly, cracking and spitting hot wax and burnt

wick. I lean over the bed. Nothing. But still, opaque smoke fills the room and grates my eyes and wraps it sausage fingers around my neck. The holy cloth catches alight. The satiny embroidered white curtains catch alight and the bible sleeping on the floor next them shrivels into itself, its pages fighting in bright blue, and the shrinking way from their edges, curling into ink and ash in the centre.

There are too many bricks and too little house and the sadness of the sunken parts in pillows and beds long after a person's scent has left.

- The lover who told you he hoped to one day meet a girl like you to marry.
- The one who beat you outside his car and then locked himself in your bathroom, crying and smashing anything fragile to his touch.
- The one who you loved the most, always getting his shit together.
- The ones who stays the night and then says "not now. Not yet. I'm not ready."
- The others you run from. 87 bricks all together.

My house of sadness is two thousand or so bricks, four windows and two doors and they have all taken on different meanings.

Police are still in search of the killers Zandile Sandlana who was found _____ in a field in the TR Section of Khayelitsha. Stripped down to only her bra, one shoe; she had a broken bottle lodged in her mouth.

A 72-year-old _____ has been found _____ in her Germiston home; her nose, ears and eyelids cut off. _____ half-naked when discovered, leading police to suspect that she had also been _____. No arrests have been made in connection to this murder and mutilation.

A 23-year-old _____ has died in hospital after murdering a 35-year-old _____ and devouring her flesh. The woman was abducted from a main road and dragged to his home, near an Engen Garage, where he killed her by slitting her throat. The woman's mother witnessed the abduction and called the police, found the man bent over on all fours and eating her raw flesh.

In Sedibeng, Vaal. The body of a 34-year-old woman is found wrapped in plastic bags and stashed under _____. Evaton, a 22-year-old man is arrested for the murder of a 16-year-old girl after he is caught with a heater and tire, attempting to burn down the shack where _____. Police investigating the Missing Person's Case of Carmelitta Baadjies found her body under a _____ in the home _____ husband in King William's Town.

A principal and _____ teachers have been arrested after gang-raping _____ learners in the coastal province of KwaZulu-Natal after a video of the rape went viral. Boithuthong High School, 30 learners _____ impregnated by their educators. 17-year-old school girl found deceased, drenched in blood from multiple stab wounds to her upper _____ in her home in Mchoncho Village, just outside Libode in in the Eastern Cape. 19-year-old Lekita Moore _____ along Tuna Road in Nooitgedacht. Stabbed several times in the stomach and throat. _____ nipples and parts of her vagina had been cut off. Qondile Mhlanga, 21, missing from Kamdladla near Tonga in April. _____ body found covered with tree branches and dumped in a _____ a week later. British woman has died after robbers broke into a house in the fishing village of Dullstroom and _____ her with a blow torch _____ shooting her _____ plastic bag down her throat. South African athlete _____ arrested _____ shooting her through a closed bathroom door.

I covered the walls in battered suede and crushed velvet. I draped the imitation luxury from floor to wall and let it sag and swing treacle-thick from the rafters of the ceiling. And when the wind blows my house glimmers viridescent, verdant, sapphire. My house scintillates lapis lazuli and ultra-marine.

I daub the floor in a tapestry of fleecy things. Things soft and furry I wove together over two hundred days, with my own hands. The loom I used is a handmade wooden thing about 3m's long and 1m wide with nails hammered into the two short sides facing each other. I use soft, woollen things for the warp, the threads that run lengthwise on the frame.

- Warp: As children we would pile into my granddad's 1970's ox-blood Peugeot with cream and red leather seats, bum to bum, heads barely peaking over the window and drive, Tata and his grandchildren, to park that is now a block of flats in a part of town that almost doesn't exist. And in the park that is no longer there, we sprawl under his tree like its overripe discarded fruit. His tree. And his park. And there was man there, hair matted with... and clothes old and tattered and matted with... and he would spread there under the tree, an acorn, a pine cone and we would eat red cakes, and peanut brittle that would cut our tongues and glue our jaws together. And he would tell us about giants. Giants that eat hot stones and naughty children and sweet potatoes and disguise their voices with honey and molasses.
- Weft: There's a K-9 training park and Tata runs the china dogs with pink patches over their eyes under planks and through barrels and into wet ditches and up onto slides and ladder-like things. Mpumi runs next them, shouting commands and Zan thinks she's one of them, struggling to keep up on all fours. I'm in the corner under the shade untrusting of the whole thing when one the dogs, it has some kind of coat with insignia on its flanks and it leaps over round things and runs up flat things and keeps running and keeps running and runs past Zan knocking her over and she cries covered by dust and it runs past Mpumi butting him behind the knees and he falls in the mud and laughs and I know I shouldn't run cause Tata told me never to run but it's getting closer and closer and so I turn and everything is spiralling and I run towards the emptiness in the middle and then I am on the ground and then it is on top of me and then everything is fur and teeth and slobber and blood. He loves dogs Tata. He loves me more so he kicks the dog off me and it whelps and runs back and locks its jaw in

his ankle and he lifts me off the ground with one arm and shakes it off saying “you’re ok. You’re ok. You’re ok.”

- Warp: He shakes our eyes open and our bodies alert and we’re back in the car again with a full chicken and powdered rolls and packets of dried fruit and biltong. And the sky is a tie-die of black and blue and sometimes at the right angle, somewhere behind us a fiery amber bleeds through. It’s a long drive and Mpumi wants Coca-Cola and Mpumi wants Oreos and Mpumi wants to pee and he wants to spit out the window so we stop at the side of the road and the earth is empty straws of grass and parched. And when we get there, to Malume on the mines everything is dystopian, and I cry because I know when we leave he will have to let the earth eat him again. And he lifts me up with one hand and puts me on his shoulders as we order food from the back door of the Wimpy and he says “I’m ok. I’m ok. I’m ok.” But he cries too.
- Weft: He has dogs that he trains and they’re vicious and he gives them the names of monsters. Monsters that swallow other monsters whole and only he can feed them. So one day, there’s a snake in the backyard. A cobra of some kind. And it’s reared up and it has its hood spread out and on the hood, gold and black bands. The dogs with the names of monsters have it backed up against the wall and are barking at it and charging at it and then backing away. So we did the logical thing, called the police who told us to call the SPCA who to told us to call some Crocodile Dundee kinda guy who by the time he came, found the snake in pieces and braaing on a fire. “Makes the dogs more vicious,” Tata said.
- Warp: In a drawer in his bedroom is an envelope that contains faded and torn documents, and pictures of himself wearing his other lives. In one he’s sitting on a wire chair in a cemented courtyard, smiling with men dressed similarly. They are in a half-circle and in the middle, a carton of chibuku or ijuba in red and white. Another is a picture of the large reticulated truck he used to drive between here and Namibia transporting metals of some value extracted from the earth. In another one, sepia with spots of green he stands in a three-piece suit and hat, hand leaning on a chair where his bald-headed eldest daughter sits, legs high above the ground, and the other children arranged around the them, challenging the camera, unsmiling.

- Weft: After he died, Tata, he would wake all the boys and remind them of their chores, them being the men of the house now, charged with taking care of us. So in their sleep they would toss and turn and talk to him. And they would walk in their sleep to get spades to clean up the dog shit, and brooms to sweep the courtyard and buckets to wash the car, and one day, I walk into the house and Gogo is the room with her door cracked open, and she is standing at the end of the bed, shouting at the ceiling telling it “leave the children alone. Leave the children alone. You decided to die. You decided to go. So go now. Go. Leave the children alone”.

We're sitting outside on the stoep we had just finished polishing, slurping syrupy beige tea from white saucers, watching the street transform from a shroud of shadow, then crumbling and distilling into smaller, more distinct silhouettes. The rounded roofs of houses like Sunday hats, black car tires - tattered rubber donuts - melting on the clay and zinc declines. Some houses sprouted the horns of some small animal, sharp bone and ivory like an ossified fascinator. Maybe a tennis ball growing a few spots of fuzzy green. It was like every day. The ladies with wide enamel bowls on their heads - pastel greens and yellow and eggs-shells - poised on rolled-up pieces of fabric. They ambled down the street oblique, straw brooms hanging off their forearms, pulling the remaining frayed ends of the graphite night behind them. Dragging in the lacklustre azure of the sky, cotton-ball clouds like lamb's tails, like the afros on our heads. The sun shimmied here when it rose, gyrating and reeling, dropping honey lava on anything that shimmered.

Tin roofs and tin houses. Aluminium cans emptied of their contents, crushed and littered onto the street. Taxis hurtling down the road, skipping over humps and holes. Chip packets. Discarded, rusty nails that always find their way into the thick underbellies of the tires of cars. The dismantled parts of cars in the house next. The shacks behind it. The modest tombstones in the graveyard two streets down. The Coca-Cola sign at MaNxumalo's shop, looping C's and rolling o's, just on the right of the barber shop where no-one ever cut their hair. The bronze crucifix raised above the church. The over-populated primary school. The empty high school. The pebbles of brown and green smashed bottle. The lonely unsheathed head of a knife, a home-made thing, battered and kicked into shape. The tin houses with their tin roofs and sometimes, the tin people within them.

Gogo woke up at 3 o'clock every morning when the sky was bruised amaranthine. The kettle boiling in the dark, the shuffling of feet, her swallowed murmuring. She had a small radio on her bedside table, a chrome thing with black trimmings many faces and dials. Its aerial was a gold copper wire we'd wound around one of the wrought upper rungs of the white burglar bars. Every morning she'd turn the dials to some church service, humming, praying, crying as she flipped through her bible; black leather cover, pages red around their gossamer edges. Lucifer was next-door peering over the fence. He was in the outside toilet, head peeking out the bowl. He was at the back of the house in the mesh and wood chicken coup, cracking eggs into the cavities of his face.

Every morning like this: Fever prayers and smiling devils. The shrill of an early phone call forcing us out from under the covers. Gogo smiling at the sullen faces.

Boil water for tea, for porridge, for bathing. Take the bucket from under the table and empty the piss into the cement drain outside. Rinse it with water and Jeyes Fluid disinfectant. Feed the dogs. Get sand from the street and sprinkle it over the dog shit. Scoop it all out with spade and throw it in a bag in the bin. Feed the chickens. Count the eggs. Thank God for the morning, for open eyes and oxygen. Pour water into the washing bowl in kitchen- two jugfuls hot, one jugful cold. Wash face first and then the rest of you. Wash the basin out and boil water for someone else. In the kitchen eat porridge with butter and milk. Wash the dishes in the sink. Rinse out the sink and place the clothes on the line outside, careful not to talk the neighbours back-opposite, the ones who beat each other up all night and steal our chicken eggs when they think no-one's looking.

The days idle after the chores, immersed in an inertia we should have been too young to know. Nothing to do but buy flavoured ice or amagwinya from the house with owls. Nothing to do but kill time. And then the sound of the banana car, its squawking hooter tornadoing up dirt, Pied Piper magnetically pulling screaming brown kids. Ashy knees kicking and piercing the thick air, arms outstretched towards the man in the driver's seat. The second we heard that sound, that clownish hooting, we sprinted to off the street splitting trajectories; Zanele to the house to fetch as many bowls and containers, Mpumi and I to the back to collect empty bottles of any kind. We traded these for as many chips as we could carry, pinching and lifting the ends of our t-shirts in to sagging concaves, making nets to catch what couldn't fit into the bowls.

Gogo comes back from church and finds us tip-toeing on the small ledge around the stoep, pretending we're tight-rope walking on a thin wire suspended kilometres in the air, crocodiles below waiting to devour us. The plants potted in old tins are the islands of safety, and the bricks we painted red bubbling rapids ready to suck us into bat-infested caves. She's in her church uniform: a red cotton shirt with a white collar, and a calf-length black skirt starched straight. Her legs are sausaged in opaque panty-hose about two hues to light for her complexion and she wears her sensible black leather shoes. "Genuine leather," she always reminds us. "Made in Italy." A plane rips its way through the sky, thick plumes tracking

white on the cloudless blue. Zan and Mpumi run through the infested imaginary waters, and I slip off the edge, hundreds of crocodile mouths snapping away at my heels. We chase after the can hurtling through the sky, shouting our wishes at its under-carriage. Sweets and chocolates and biscuits with peanuts. Cars with battery-operated remote controls. Dolls with two eyes, and two arms and two legs. New clothes and thick-soled shoes. We wished for our parents to come visit. To come back from wherever they were and lift us up in their perfumed arms.

*

There are ways to make things go away. Things the body cannot keep. If you store them there too long they'll infect you, rupturing your spleen, poisoning every warm part of you.

*

To store a secret, you need bones. We bought ours at the Greek butchery near the train station, wrapped frozen in paper and stuffed into white plastic bags. The bigger the bones the better. Goat and lamb and cow and ox.

Chicken bones don't work so well. They break too easily under the slightest pressure, form inconspicuous fissures from which secrets might leak through. Submerge the bones in lots of water and boil them outside on a paraffin or gas cooker. Broil them until any meat or muscle still desperately clinging there softens and falls to the bottom of the pot. Once cooled, scoop the pulpy brown-red marrow out with a spoon. Leg bones, the spinal column, the tail bones work best for this. Rinse the bones in cold water and lay them flat on newspapers to dry.

*

In the front there is patch of grass we sprinkle with our bath water everyday. Before we step out of the tub, we are all required to spit in it. Me first, then Mpumi, then Zan. "This is to keep your bonds strong," Gogo tells us. "So you can always find each other in life. Roped together like this." There isn't much to water out there. One tree that smells minty and green like camphor. That sprouts nothing but bees and a few sparrows and willow birds. In winter, they climb into the gap between the ceiling and the roof and keep us up at night with their scratching and squeaking. With the end a broom, Gogo will tap on the wood-panelled ceiling. "Shut up in Jesus name," she shouts at the birds. "I command you to leave right now." But

the birds have never heard of God, do not know to be afraid of him, so they chirp and claw and squeal until eventually, we all fall asleep.

It is in that patch of grass, in the dark soil around the roots of the trees that we bury our bones. Mpumi softens the earth with a spade, turning the soil over, and Zan and I refine it, scoop fist-sized hollows with our hands. Plant bones there so nothing else may grow. Store your secrets not to forget them. Store your secrets to keep them.

*

There's man Gogo goes to church with. A tall man who wears the black suit and red waistcoat of his vestment. He has to stoop low to walk through the door, and he always forgets our names, calling us by whatever words form in his mind. He takes his tea milky and he talks to too much, too loud, his voice emaciated and punctured with pockets of air. When he comes over we have to sit in the lounge, sticking to the plastic-covered sofas, listening to him preach about the dangers of cartoons and toys and demon-possessed collecting cards. Gogo calls him a true man of God. A righteous soldier in the army of the Lord and when he places his hands on her head to bless her, she shoots her arms to the sky, falls back onto the couch and cries. "By the mercy of the lord by the mercy of the lord by the mercy of the lord". This man is my first stinking bone.

*

Secrets that store well must be calcified early in the morning at first light, or at midnight when the house has shallowed it's breathing. I chose one carved loose from the neck of a bull, the size of my fist.

*

He comes in the night. He comes in his vestment of black and white and red. He comes to lay hands and prayers and hands on the bodies of little children.

Gogo was at meeting of the Mother's Guild when he swung the backdoor open and let himself into the house. He greeted us, gave us money to buy him amagwinya and asked for a cup of tea, pulling wide the neck of his shirt. So they went to the MaKhumalo's Spaza and I made him his tea how he liked it. "Real milk please, none of that condensed stuff." And I brought it to him on a tray, placed it on the table and sat on the couch, paging through channels on the TV. The routine rarely changed. It was always the same emaciated conversation, his bony gripping onto the tea cup as if it were alive, as if it would slip from his

fingers and escape from his grasp. “How are you doing in school? How are your friends? Have you spoken to your mom today? Have you prayed? You should pray. Let us pray.” He places his hands on my head. He places his hands on my neck. He places his hands on my _____.

*

I boiled my first bone for ten hours. It was a round disc, two ridges sticking out laterally from either side and a perfect hollow in the middle. I salted the hole in the centre and sucked the oily, fatty marrow into my mouth, then used a thin sharp stick to force out whatever remained in the middle.

To tell a bone your story, to hold your secret fast the size of the bone, the circumference of its hollow must be in direct and equal proportion to the magnitude of the confession. Hold the bone, now clean, now cooled up to your mouth and whisper to it the thing that must be buried. The man with his breath like warm yesterday, with his black suit and red waistcoat. With his prayers pressed into the small of my back. How he placed his hands on my head, on my neck, on my _____.

*

The plane flew overhead casting us in imaginary shadow and we chased it and we threw at it everything we hoped for. We run under its belly, till we can't run anymore and at the rubbish dump adjacent the graveyard we stop. We're not allowed to play there anymore since the body of the girl was found, each bit severed and scattered. It took them a few days to find all of her. A head cleanly severed, perhaps still bloodied where it might meet the sternum, lodged in one of the higher outstretched arms of a lonely tree, its life juice dripping and snaking down the trunk, puddling in the clenched and twisted fingers of its roots. A foot shorn shoddily from the rest of itself, toenails chipped, just a few scribbled flecks of grey still clinging to the tips stretching haphazardly to the convex where cuticle meets keratin. It was Pozozo who found her, or rather he found her hand, or rather he found one manicured digit with a red acrylic nail affixed atop of it. It was there by itself, just alone in the dust. Around it; rubber sandals snapped at the toe, grimy black where foot once forced against sole. A crushed can of Coca-Cola still leaking. The rind of an orange, a perfect spiralling strip. Some misting cones of dung. A curved pinky, skewed by genetics or trauma, small nicks above where it had been separated from its hands, a piece of flesh gouged free and hanging loose, partly charred fingerprints still tender and pink. So Pozozo picks the finger up and runs down the garbage heap, snot dribbling down his chin, kicking up pieces of tin and aluminium cans and shiny discarded packets of chips. And he chases us around with it, jabbing it in our faces, accusing us in red, and we jumped over tombstones screaming

and we climbed up trees screaming and laughing and we hopped over fences screaming and laughing and crying until Thembi's mom yanked him by the neck, also screaming when she saw the finger and it was no longer a game. It was a real human finger that once belonged to someone and everyone was hoping it was someone they didn't know.

*

"You should make this a bone," Gogo says undressing in her bedroom. She helps her grandmother with the buttons that her fingers will not wrap around. She unclips the brooch from the white bib around her neck and they fold everything neatly, placing the bundle on the bed. The white bib. The red blazer. The black skirt. The white hat. "Otherwise bile will start leak into your blood. It will make you sick."

The next day she wakes her at five in the morning and there is already water in the tub and herbs floating on it. On the stove in a 25 litre pots are 12 bones of different sizes and before she washes herself, she lays a long femur, hollowed and boiled, out in the sun. "That's a big bone you have there." A large back assaults her with the words.

*

Sometimes your bones will choose you. Sometimes they will tell you who they need to be. Sometimes, you will not know you are dying, that your liver is leaking and all your secrets are killing you. The bones know what needs to be ossified, if you listen carefully child, they will tell you who they need to be.

*

Outside she sat with the bone flat on the ground, picking it up and placing it back down again. Running her fingers over the rough ridges that had formed on its polished side, tapping her knuckles against the fist like ball where it would meet joint. There were small holes here, as if many small things had bubbled out the top of it. She would rather be in bed dreaming of sugar cane fields but she knew better than to argue with the old woman. Soon the sun would be out and the secret would be lost. She whispered to the bone, "what do you want me to tell you?"

*

On the other end of the street a young man lies passed out on the pavement, the lower half of his body forced into tight skinny jeans and intruding onto the street. Every now and then someone will pass and try to shake him awake. A boy who lives on the street near the

catholic church, a friend man sings his way loudly towards home, and sees there in the denim the legs of his friends splayed wildly apart, his head resting on a small rock the neighbours had placed there to deter people from parking on their small patch of grass. He bends down, spilling some amber liquid onto the grass, and lift the sleeping arm up. It drops violently to ground and the sleeping man groans a little, but he does not wake up. The friend places his bottle carefully on the ground and this time uses both hands to hurl the man upright. He rests the hands on his shoulders and uses all the weight in his diminutive drunken frame to throw the man the man to his feet. He stumbles a little, and takes two steps back before they both tumble back onto the ground. Defeated he sits down next to his friend, takes a large swig from the green bottle and resumes singing his song.

From where I am seated on the ground I can see them but they cannot see me. I giggle loudly and the man turns to find the sound and Gogo raps the back of the head with her open palm. “Those boys have nothing to do with this. Speak to your bone and mind your own business.” I do not know that I have business with this bone. I’m tired and bored and so I tell it things when Gogo walks to the kitchen, but the bone rejects them all.

I tell the bone that I miss my parents but I not sure I love them and I as whisper the words into the one end they spill out onto the sheet of newspaper on the other.

I tell the bone that at school I put my jersey over my head and walk on the wooden balance beams, calling myself Jessica or Samantha but the words harden and shatter as they fall to they ground, dissolving on impact.

I tell the bone about the time I peed on the bed and blamed it on Zan. I tell the bone about Stephanie who took my money out my blazer pocket and told the teacher that I was a thief. “How can she have so much money if she’s black?”. I tell the bone about the boy in the transport scheme to school who sticks his hands in my dress to “help me pull out my wedgies.” Nothing. Nothing. Nothing each time.

Frustrated I throw it against the red and brown brick fence. It hits the wall, bounces back down and rolls slowly in my direction, stopping at my big toe.

The man across the road has begun to stir. He lifts his head up tentatively as though peering out from underground, but then tilts it back down again, rolling onto his side. His friend,

bottle now empty begins to nudge at the sleeping man with his feet, kicking him awkwardly in the back, swivelling the drunk man like a human see-saw. The friend stumbles to his feet, clumsily dusting dirt off his pants and as he careens a swerving two-step down the road, he shouts to no-one in particular that it is only witches that are awake at this hour. It is only the evil ones who have to labour for their sleep.

*

I am not evil. I cannot sleep. I fall asleep but almost every night she jolts me awake, a puddle on my skin and on in the bed. I do not know this girl but she says she knows me. She stands in the shadow of the door in white frilly dress that would be more suited for a baptism than my dreams. Her face is tumble of twigs and branches woven together to form a nest and on the short coiled afro on her head, a gold crown. A paper-cut out of human figures holding hands floats over her like a balloon. The last time she came, I feel off the bed and blood run out of my nose and she bent over at the waist and stared at me quizzically, “Are you afraid of me? You shouldn’t be afraid of me.”

I tell the bone about the girl, my height, maybe my age who will not let me sleep and the rough parts on its white smooth out and the holes on the calcified fists on either end of it close up, sealing the girl in. With a garden spade, I turn some soil loose and stick the bone upright into the earth under the tree, scooping the dirt into the gaps around it with my small hands.

*

That night I sleep until the sun rises, getting up only once to pee in the yellow bucket under the bedroom table but in the morning, the dog has freed himself off his chain and dug up the long femur I had buried the day before, dropping it on the rubber mat outside the kitchen door. Gogo stands on the inside of the house, staring at the bone, a mug of hot tea obscuring her face sway of steam.

A swarm of ants have gathered around the bone, a million ellipses busying themselves dizzily around it.

Gogo steps over the bone and heads to the drain adjacent the toilet swinging the yellow piss bucket in her hand. She says nothing to me and I stand there too staring the bone as those black frenzy around it like misplaced punctuation. I shift from the front of the door, pinching

the rubber mat at its corners and dragging it onto the stoep. I pour water over it wash the ants away and then lift the bone and move it to a square on sun in the front.

*

Some bones will not remain buried. Some secrets are not yours to hide. Sometimes the bones will assemble themselves when the moon is bursting. They will climb into bed with you and place a bony arm around your midriff as you sleep, and they will leave stains of water when you wake, when you go.

This bone is not mine to bury.

The rest of that day I tip-toe around Gogo, avoiding eye-contact, avoiding being caught alone with her. I feel I have done something wrong, but I don't know what. In the kitchen, she pours maize-meal into a pot of hot water for porridge humming some gospel song that sounds like all the rest. With her back turned, with her eyes on the thickening white sputtering in front her, I sneak out to the bone, place it and a red and yellow plastic bag and run to the garbage heap where I toss it amongst rubber sandals snapped at the toe, grimy black where foot once forced against sole. A crushed can of Coca-Cola still leaking. The rind of an orange, a perfect spiralling strip. Some misting cones of dung.

If she has noticed the missing bone, she says nothing. I help button and zip her into her reds and whites and watch from the window as we walk to catch a taxi to church.

*

It is Pozozo who finds the bone. Mpumi, Zan and I are in the street chasing desires and he's in garbage heap rummaging through the filth for thin strips of metal and cans to construct wire cars from. The bone has grown smaller and curved and has affixed to the top of it, a red acrylic nail, a small piece yellow plastic stuck under it. The pink is curved, skewed by genetics or trauma, small nicks above where it had been separated from its hands, a piece of flesh gouged free and hanging loose, partly charred fingerprints still tender and pink. So Pozozo picks the finger up and runs down the garbage heap, his face a mess of dust and mucous, kicking up pieces of tin and aluminium cans and shiny discarded packets of chips. A curved pinky, skewed by genetics or trauma, small nicks above where it had been separated from its hands, a piece of flesh gouged free and hanging loose, partly charred fingerprints still tender and pink. So Pozozo picks the finger up and runs down the garbage heap, snot dribbling down his chin, kicking up pieces of tin and aluminium cans and shiny discarded packets of chips. He whirlwinds down the garbage heap things go flying, the bent heads of

spoons, unsheathed homemade knives beaten into sharpness, a one-armed teddy bear with buttons for eyes, rotten banana peels the skins of tomatoes. He runs until he reaches where we stand shouting hope into the sky and pulls the finger out of his pocket, poking it in our faces, accusing us in red, and we jumped over tombstones screaming and we climbed up trees screaming and laughing and we hopped over fences screaming and laughing and crying at the finger that was once a bone that was once mine.

There are things we can do in places like this. Some more obscure womanly arts that have fallen out of practice. While abused, or rather, in disuse, these practices may provide some clues on determining how to celebrate and survive the seemingly insurmountable.

Take for example the ancient practices of holding the body, stretches for women in distress at the end of the universe. Or even The Questionnaire for the Quest of Breath; used when in doubt of whether or not a woman has actually survived; of whether or not they are actually alive.

You are familiar with the phrase, scared half to death? Perhaps you were working home day, your laptop and phone thrown into a dusty canvas tote bag slung around your right shoulder and you imagine, think you imagine, footsteps shadowing yours somewhere behind you.

And you turn your head to look without turning your head to look and there in your peripheral vision, just shy of the illumination water-falling from the lamppost, a mass void of light. You clutch your bag closer to you, in the crook of your arm and sneak a hand in, fondling around for your phone and what was that? Are there more steps? Are they closer? Are they louder. Or pulled up at a red light in the decaying days of winter, your car window cracked slightly open, that song that your brother likes laughing out of the speakers when suddenly, with suddenness there is man you do not know in the passenger seat of your vehicle and this man, a hat on his head and blue overalls on his body is pushing you out of the vehicle that you slowed to halt when the light on the robot turned from amber to red.

Were you asleep in the bed of a friend, dreaming of sugar cane fields when a crack of lightening burnt the field up or a crack of pain shot through you lower abdomen and when you woke, your friend was anchor weighting you down. Your friend was man on top of you. Your friend was man inside of you saying, "If this isn't what you wanted then why are here?" Scared half to death. Or maybe to the precipice of it, one foot in and one foot out. If you have experienced something like this, it may be necessary for you to perform these stretches in order to bring yourself back.

These stretches are more effective when done early in the morning, or very late at night. For the stretches to take, for the lengthening to become, light must be at its thinnest or night at its heaviest dragging weight. The stretches are to be repeated over a period of two weeks at the same time everyday, two days apart. Light a white candle and place where something hard

meets another hard thing. The acute where wall meets wall for example. Or the inside of a windowsill. And place next to the candle a small bowl of water.

Stretch number one.

Stand with your legs very far apart and squat, imitating the stance of sumo wrestler at the beginning of a match. Very slowly, lift your arms up simultaneously until they form a straight line from the tip of your middle finger on your right hand, to the tip of your middle finger on your left hand. Pull your shoulders down away from your ears, away from your neck and when the tension feels as though it is about to crack, scream from the deepest hollow of your stomach. Scream until your throat is raw. Scream until your ears pop. Scream until the candle eats its own flame.

Stretch number 2:

To ensure that you are still intact, it is necessary to monitor your pulse by placing two fingers to the side of your neck and measuring how often it pumps in a minute. Take note of this number. Let ten minutes pass and then place both hands on your crotch, the right hand on top of the left. Take note of how many times it pumps in a minute. If the pumps in your heart and the pumps in your groin do not match, it may be required for you to sit and squat over a steaming bucket of water for five minutes. Recite the names of all the people who hurt you here.

Stretch number 3:

Stretch number is not really a stretch. It is the invention of MIT's Kelly Dobson, a device worn like a backpack around the shoulders that allows the carrier to scream into it, and release the screams later at a more appropriate time. Use this bag in moments of rage and frustration, screaming into it when you're having a quiet drink at a bar and stranger pulls his stool next to yours. And then the stranger, handsome in a boring way sees the ring on your finger and asks, "So who's the lucky man?". "Woman," you correct him. And he pretends he has misheard so he repeats "woman" and you repeat "woman" and he laughs "So you don't like dick at all?" At this time, you can pull out the bag, swing it onto your lap, insert your head into the opening and scream. The invention will hold the sound until you can find a place to release the sound.

We may find at this time a desire for certain women to revert to the dusty tongue of Inflicted Language. There are some women who bleed invisible things that smell like lavender and mint, who's hurt is like honey to heal those too lazy, those too violent to heal themselves. For these women, perhaps prayers are not sacred enough. Perhaps prayers are performances for those who always find their politics mounted on plinths. For these women, it is necessary to pray in another tongue. To pray in Inflicted Language. Here consonants sit gutturally in the pit of the throat and vowels line the tongue, sticking to the domed hard part of the upper palate and in the gaps between teeth. Press your tongue to the top of your palate making it hard and flat. Press your tongue to the back of mouth. Say the words you need to hear the most.

In the kitchen. I am cleaning coffee rinds out of a cup and my brother is in town; lies horizontal on the couch, something flat on his stomach and something loud in his tears. My mother is here visiting too; she is out doing whatever it is that mother's do when they doubt the quality of their daughter's lives. I pour the remainder of the coffee down the drain-hole, stick my fingers into the translucence of glass, and scoop, handful by handful, tiny grains of brown, feeling the miniscule hard against my fingers, under my nails. I have my hands under the tap, rubbing the one against the other when it happens. Slight. Almost imperceptible, as though I am not supposed to know that it is happening. The house shifts. Quick. Quiet. An involuntary twitch.

They are here, my mother and brother, because men with knives insist on allowing themselves into my home. To create the kind of protective spell that only blood kin can create. To split open their veins in order to seal mine. The men keep coming and keep coming. Their knives sharpened against the stone of my anxieties. I am new here and mostly alone. And this town is small and it does the things that small towns do, operating on an impenetrable internal logic. A logic that either drags one along, or drowns them. It lends itself to loneliness in its smallness, it's antiquated colonial way. Lonely is my default disposition. And so, I find ways to be comfortable here at the intersection of loneliness and loneliness. Here, people either startle when you greet them or demand the perfunctory and platitudes. The intimacies are forced and far apart. You are either a stranger or a monument. There is no in between.

The first man. I have folded myself onto a couch and the moon is swollen. I can see it just outside the window. It has lowered itself so that I may reach for it and place it, a grapefruit, in my pocket, on a plate, in a bowl for preservation. He happens at around 7 in the evening. This is what I say in the police report. I was alone at home on the couch when the door swung open and let the night in, and a man in a black hoodie pulled low over the crown of his head, and a knife.

He seems unsure, like perhaps he stumbled home drunk with the day and thought he was opening the door to his own apartment. Like I am not supposed to be here. Like I broke into his abode, replaced his furniture with mine, his self with me. He sticks his head in first.

Looks around, unsure. He does not see me there, mahogany and leather like the couch until he commits, steps fully in and I begin to materialize.

The first man is not the most original thief. He watches too many movies and says the things like they say the things on the screen. He pulls a knife out of the waist of his pants and points it at me, an accusation, an implication in steel.

Don't Move Dont Make A Sound Shut The Fuck Up Do Not Move If You Scream I Will Kill You Where Is The Money Give Me Your Money Im Going To Fucking Kill You. There are oceans in my ears.

He tells me stand up so I stand but he pushes me back down again and so I sit. "I said don't fucking move." this not the time to argue for the finer points of communication and clarity. What I want to know is, does he want me to stand up or to not move. Do I stand and then remain that way, frozen in that position? Like he said he would spray me a million times but he has a knife in his hand. Will he puncture me aerosol-like, leave me perforated and porous. Is there another weapon that will spray, maybe bullets, maybe pepper-gas? He has a knife. It is not a knife. It a homemade blade rough and battered and he has wrapped tape around the one end of it to form a handle. It is not a knife. It is a knife.

Together we search through my things to help him find what he is looking for. His phone. His laptops. His furniture. His money. His life that I have usurped. He pushes me towards my bedroom and I am embarrassed. Bed unmade. Underwear on floor. Clothes, books, loose sheets of paper strewn between the tangled blankets. I see the underwear already on the floor. I see the bed open. My underwear is already on the floor and my bed lies gaping. So I push him. I push and I run. I push passed him and I run. I run out the door and into night. It reaches out an arm and trips me and I slip on some mud. I fall into mud and I hear him behind me. I hear him behind me and I swim myself up. I run to the main house and bang on the door. I bang on the door and no-one is home. No-one is home because I live alone. I live alone because lonely is my disposition. Is he still behind me?

*

"Did you feel that?" I turn to my brother, my hands still baptising themselves under a warm flow. Brother is still flat on the couch with something flat on his chest flickering light onto

his face, something loud in his ears. He does not hear me. I walk to him, pull the buds out his ears and ask him, “didn’t you just feel the house move?” “The house? Moving?” He is puzzled, pretends to be. “Maybe it was just you moving and you didn’t know you were doing it.” Because what kind person would not know what their body is doing. He does these things, uses cruel logic to douse emotion. To extricate himself by way of explanation. Houses do not move. People do. When my mom pulls into the driveway, I am outside in the garden, picking stones and stuffing them into my pockets, anchoring myself down. To feel myself move.

Smaller stones I sew them into the hems of things. In the inner seams of jackets, in the blue denim crotch of a pair of jeans. I stuff some rounder grey stones in the upturned hems of trousers, and they shift when I walk. They rub against each, a comforting grating sound, an ankle shaker. Some I press into the grooves under my brogues and sneakers and every time I walk I tap dance. I lift myself light in the air to tease gravity and feel the stones pull my back to the earth with a clap and a clack. The larger ones - I wash them in salt-water, coil them in thin wire and chicken mesh and attached them to strips of leather to wear around my neck, my wrists. When I tie my hair into a high whorled bun on the top of my head, I slip a single stone in the folds of braid and hair. I have a stone I slip under my tongue when my words threaten to escape. It is almost perfectly round, a marbled warp of white, pink and grey. In my mouth it is always cool and it tastes like powder, like chalk. I flip it to the top of my tongue and press it into my pallet until it begins to hurt. When I spit it out, a cold indent of its size remains. To feel myself speak. I have a pumice stone I found on the beach in Hamburg, and I use it to scrape my feet raw. I scrub until it hurts to walk. I scrub until flakes of skin float on my bath water, and then I scrape at myself some more. In between my fingers they feel like jewels. Once I tried to push a crystal of Rose Quartz into my vagina, but got scared and just rubbed it over the folds instead.

I am trying to explain to Brother that living on the frontier of Settler County means that you must make nice with its ghosts. “No-one here was buried,” I say pointing towards the mountain with tall trees. “They won’t let us forget that they’re here. That we are here, living in the first wounds of colonization. That we are infected with time and we are pus and blood and the putrid yellow of its plasma. The ghosts are alive and we are dead. Everyone is dead here.” I am sick and we all are and he does not understand me, lying flat with something on his chest and noise in his ears.

There is a man on the roof of the house across from us. He wears: an oversized brown hoodie, big brown pants and an orange t-shirt. He walks gingerly on the mercury ribbons of roofing, tip-toes to the end and pivots; rooftop ballet. He lowers himself off the edge, one leg first swaying like an enchanted cobra, looking for footing. He finds a ledge, brings the other leg down and slides, belly flat against the edge. He stands on the landing for a few, looks around, jumps down, disappears.

“Do you know what I mean? About the restlessness? This is why there are so many churches here.”

“And buildings with inverted crucifixes on them.” He finds this funny.

When the man appears again he is on the silver of another house. Just standing there held down by black gum boots. An argent upsurge laps at his boots, shimmering in the sunlight like a quiet tide. He looks around, swings his head wild, holds his hands at his waist akimbo. He repeats his steps. Finds a place on the edge. Again the swaying of enchanted legs, the lowering like a pulley. The disappearance.

Two blocks from the house, there is a building in a shameful shade of blue, some kind of annex or steeple drilling up through the head of it. I take Brother there, better view of the phantasmagoria. On the inside a staircase snakes through the centre, spiralling over itself like a dizzying top, winding one landing on top of the next like twisting damaged vertebrae. We heave ourselves through its frayed nerves endings, spinning up, close to each other, the stairs so narrow, so steep that there is no room to stop. The guide, an older man of serious faces and jangling keys leads us out onto the roof, closing the door behind him. He sifts through his tambourine of keys, finds one, and opens the door to the steeple. The room drowns in light for a little. Tiny dust particles pirouette, suspended in air, trapped here. We step in, Brother and I. The man rustles, clashes and clangs, swings a peeling door closed. It is the dark of ancient winters. He clears his throat. He begins; “There are seven of these Victorian Camera Obscuras in the world.” In his one hand he holds a thin wooden rod. He gestures with this wand, pointing above us, in front, behind him to the painted wooden wall. “What is happening here, right on top of our roof here, we’ve got a turret.” The wand pushes up. “The turret is having a mirror inside. The mirror is taking a picture, putting it through to a double

lens convex and throwing it here, on top of this table, on this bowl.” He taps in front of him three times in the dark. There is a raised, circular platform in the centre of the room. An altar. On it, a white Perspex bowl. We have come to see the oracle. To diagnose the conditions of our souls. “This Camera Obscura has a 180-360 degree view of Grahamstown. This house, the man who used to live here, he was a watch maker, a jeweller, an astronomer.” The man moves in dark, the air makes room for him. He shuts a door somewhere, pulls on a string and a trap door on the ceiling of the building swings open. He drags on a green and white string, a pulley of sorts and there in the white hollow of the bowl, Grahamstown bent around its curves, sunken in the middle, parts of the image climbing up the rim to reach us. He points things out. An Afrikaans school built in 1954. A library. A red roof of some civic building. “We have three towers here, the clock tower, a flag pole, and the Camera Obscura. That is where we are.” To follow the images, we move around the altar, séance. He points out the Cathcart Arms Hotel (Known as eKatini to the savvy) the oldest in this town, built in 1845. “On the right here, this is the start of the township called Fingo village. This here,” he moves the stick, tapping it on the bowl, “is the township called eGazini. EGazini meaning bloodshed. This is where the white people fought amaXhosa in 1819. After the British defeated amaXhosa, Queen Victoria donated the land to Mfengu people. This is why they call it Fingo Village.” He pulls the string again. A new image materializes and we step to the right to face it. “There is a road here. Reverend Road. There is a history about this road. I’ll take you back up to 1976. Up to 1980. During the uprisings. This road, it was the only road to Port Elisabeth via Grahamstown to East London. No other way. If you were a white person in this time, you can’t go on this road otherwise you will get a nice gift of a crown to your head in the form of a red brick, a nice necklace of burning tire and delicious juice of petrol.” In the dark I cannot make out his features. The man sounds proud. He is smiling. He is speaking. “And here at the top, we have Makana Hill. Makana he was a leader. A king. A chief, a prophet of AmaXhosa. Before that battle of 1819, he came and stand on top of the hill with his 10 000 warriors to fight 4000 British soldiers. 4000 British soldiers all armed with guns. Makana and his 10000 men with spears and shields. And Makana said these words, when the battle was about to start ‘their bullets will turn to water.’ But the bullets stayed bullets and more than 4000 warriors died.” We continue to walk a circle around the altar, our bodies tracing its circumference. We walk, he points. A bloodshed here. A church. A bloodshed there. A church. The British. The Boers. The Blacks. A church. A bloodshed there. A bloodshed here. Another church.

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At the house, I keep bumping into things. I walk into walls. Bruise my arms. Stub my toes against the edges of the couch, hard against the angles of the table. It has moved, the house, just a little to the left. Nothing where it was. I reach to put my phone away and it drops on the floor. I squat to sit on the leather and slide to the parquet tiling. At the greying downturn where ceiling meets wall, thin cracks have begun to appear. They lightning down to meet. To bear silent witness. I choose one crack - the deepest one - and follow it as it zig-zags across the walls. Where it's born, in an acute juncture of wall, wall and ceiling board it is deep, wide enough fit a sheet of paper and very dark. It thins and lightens in colour across the walls, skirting the top of a framed artwork. It drops as it enters the kitchen and streams out the kitchen door and stops outside just above the green rain-water tank. I try to climb on the tank but I slip. I bang on the walls. Nothing. Put my ear to them. Nothing. I lift the loosened floorboards and peer underneath. Nothing. I stand at the window, looking to be wrong and all the roofs of all the houses have moved a few degrees to the right. The man in brown and orange is back there again, dancing his dance on mercury. Again he repeats his steps. Again, disappearance. When I look again, a brown and orange cat soaks sun on the tin sheeting, passed out adjacent to two solar panels.

Mother says we should pray. Mother says we should pray more. We are in the same house, in the same room and she texts me bible verses, routinely looking up from her phone to gauge my response. In one of her dreams I walk through the streets of Grahamstown naked covered only by a dizzying haze. She sends something from Ephesians. "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take a stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers and the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

There are bricks outside, a silent stack sitting behind the cars, behind the bins. One by one I bring them in, whisper to them and place them in corners, on cupboards, on carpets. A brick behind each door and at each "L" where wall greets wall. Bricks amongst shoes; sharp-tipped heels, stiletto boots, white-soled sneakers and fresh polished brogues and bricks. A brick in the fridge and in the freezer. In the drawers of the coffee table and under the couch. To weight the house down. Bricks. So it can feel itself moving.

*

The second man is actually two men or three or more. At 3 am they open the gate and it's the sound of metal giving way that rouses me. And then a door slams, my car door. And then another door, my front door shaking in its frame, vibrating with night and violence. It shakes like that and shakes like that, a hand on the other end adamant. Windows and doors take on new meanings. Their transparency is a threat. Windows are things that shatter and crack. Doors swing wide keeping nothing in, nothing out. Holding nothing but their ability to transmute into shards that cut, that spray, that perforate. I have no lines marked into my body. No roots rubbed into the splits of skin to protect.

The moon was full, or it was new. I scrawled my intentions on the back of a till slip and tucked them into my phone cover for safe-keeping.

Don't Move Dont Make A Sound Shut The Fuck Up Do Not Move If You Scream I Will Kill You Where Is The Money Give Me Your Money Im Going To Fucking Kill You

When the police arrive, finally, I've thrown a gown over my nakedness. They stand outside the door pantomiming their irritation for their own amusement. They provide reasons. The time of morning. The cold of winter. "We only have one van here. We can't keep running to your house every time you think you hear something. You know you just pulled us out a real crime, to do what exactly? What do you want us to do?" The woman, she is squat, low to ground and wide at its axis. She punctuates her rant with yawns, rubs the crust of sleep from her eyes. "It's not like you woke up with these men on top of you. Just be grateful and get some sleep." Because I am angered into silence, I throw up in the back of my mouth and swallow it.

Above the couch where my brother lies flat - something flat on his chest, loud in his ears - is an artwork large on the wall and framed in black. It tells itself slant, the top right corner pointing higher than it should. I stand on the couch, try to re-order it, my brother saying things like "a little more on the left, a little more, a little more. Perfect." But as soon as I move my hand away, it slides back down askance.

There are more cracks, millions of them, veining from under the brown wooden skirting. The braver ones grow up to meet the cracks tumbling down from the ceiling. There are cracks on

the inside of the house and cracks on the outside. On the face of the building, looking towards the gate, a few centimetres of concrete foundation unveil themselves. On the other, tiny black ants scurry away, a row of ellipses and full stops.

*

I tell my mother that I'm afraid all the time. I grind my teeth into dust and grit and spit grains through a tight jaw when I wake up in the morning. Later, my phone vibrates. My mother sends this: "Have I not commanded you? Be strong, vigorous, and very courageous. Be not afraid, neither be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

She finds my bricks; in cupboards, on carpets, in corners. "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance (to the full, till it overflows)."

She doesn't talk with her own tongue anymore. She speaks in the words of Joshua, of Mark, Paul and Job.

I cry early in the mornings, very late at night in the dark. I wake up and she's placed a ripped piece of paper on my night stand. Her handwriting is clean, blue. The L's are hard elbows and the o's are perfect globes. "Lord, you are the God who saves me; day and night I cry out to you. May my prayer come before you; turn your ear to my cry."

*

"Have you heard of umkhokha?" Friends are concerned. Family is afraid. They ask about this sudden closeness with violence, this pattern of men with knives as though I am doing something to court it. They call to check if my doors are locked, if my windows are latched. They text for updates, for possible clues and suggestions. The slaughtering of something white, it's blood for mine. Submergence in sea water. Holy Water sprayed on the outer perimeter and gate. Mounds of salt in the corner. Frankincense and imphepho burning at the window. Wild Garlic in my bath water that breaks my skin into rashes.

"Umkhokha?"

“What I mean is, has anyone in your family ever had the experience of being robbed, of being killed in a robbery?”

There is uncle. Stabbed footsteps from his house, the unintelligible story writ in blood from the gatepost to the street. A 30cm incision from below his third rib bone pouring down. The men in my family have strange ways of dying and the setting rarely ever changes. Always almost home but never quite. Always a shebeen a stumble away. In the street, alone, no-one to catch the final wheezing, to give that breath a direction, a way home.

He explains that umkhokha is like recurring family incident. A trauma that plays itself in sets and loops, travelling by genome and bloodstream. “You have to do a ceremony yokuvala umkhokha, you have to close the loop.”

*

The third man was three men or four or more. They came back because they keep coming back, because they still do not have what they want.

We buried my uncle. We did not see him. No-one touched his body or mouthed breath into his ashen lips. No-one brought a wet cloth to his brow and wiped the sticky remnants of life off it. Who called him by his names? Who crossed his arms over his chest? Who combed the grey out his hair?

Again the gate skipping on its tracks, a banshee squeal of metal dragging metal. A slamming of doors. A rattling of doors. A conflation of meanings; windows and doors and my underwear on the floor. Next time I will kill them and wash my feet in their blood.

Don't Move Dont Make A Sound Shut The Fuck Up Do Not Move If You Scream I Will Kill You Where Is The Money Give Me Your Money Im Going To Fucking Kill You

My uncle was buried, but we didn't bury him. And that's a problem, my friend explains. “You don't bury a person with their body unwashed cause inxeba alipholi and the wounds call other wounds.”

Loops are repetitions. The over and over again of over and over againness. The starting back at start. The elliptical explorations always retuning to self, starting not at 1 but at zero. At nothingness. In the void. You have to close the loop or risk getting lost in it.

*

Mother unloads groceries in the kitchen. It seems as though everyday she is in the kitchen unpacking plastic bags, shifting things around in the fridge, in the cupboard. She washes the windows, muttering to herself, commanding God. She mops the floor spreading grace and mercy across the floor in soapy suds. She pours praise onto the tops of tables and dries them off with worship. Her eyes are dimmer these days, she presses her fingers into the flesh around them, pushing prints into the thinning skin. In the kitchen she is a tap, she is a knife, she is the tiles on the walls. She peels herself off the walls, lifting her brown off the cupboard doors and walks to the plastic bags gathered on the counter. She upturns a sack of oranges into a fruit bowl, the paper bag crumpling under its hollowness. She grabs a skirt of bananas and heads towards the fridge. She opens the door, makes to put the fleshy fruit in its buzzing belly, and stops, confused for a second, like maybe they don't belong there. And then it happens again. This time the house shudders hard. A lone orange escapes from the bowl, spilling off the grey counter-top and rolls into the corner by the door. The other oranges follow and the huddle there behind the wood for some hope of safety, some protection to be found. My brother runs into the kitchen and she is still standing there, her hand on the door, bananas in the other. "What the hell was that?" he screams. She tells him to calm down, her grip still firm on the handle, blood screaming away from her knuckles. The curtains lean on their rings and slide down the length of the rod, bunching up to dress the end of the wall in frills. The bookshelf crashes into the table. The cupboard doors flap open and a waterfall of glasses, cups, plates comes chiming down. The house is tilting off the ground gentle. The other roofs seem to be receding slowly, their metallic laminate shimmer from further and further away, so that the grooves in the metal become waves, and the waves become ripples and the ripples whirl in the sun until they are just light. The man on the roof stands there, transfixed. He lifts his right hand to his brow and squints and as we get higher, he gets smaller and smaller until all he is a furry smudge, a brown and orange cat raising its whiskers to the sky.

Appendix of Missing Words in Particular Order

Mutilated; sharp, foreign object; with a blunt object; stolen; woman; women; drugged; bed; fractured and haemorrhaging; asphyxiation; trachea; meridian response; hacked into pieces and set alight; gagged; married and pregnant; mother of three; acquitted of all charges; bleeding out; neighbour heard the screaming; exsanguinate; teenager; public; dead; broken bottle shoved; rupture; gun shot wound; smiling; mutilated and disfigured; dislocated; missing; lost; exuberance and joy; amputated; sanguine; vagina; cavity; for over three weeks; decaying and decomposing; beautiful; screaming in the night; side of the road; ditch; dam; damning; 3 large rocks; spinning on the tip of a candle-flame; a piece of skull and hair.

