

AS ANAÏS NIN SAID:
"WE WRITE TO TASTE LIFE TWICE.
IN THE MOMENT AND IN RETROSPECT."

No single collection of poems and short stories can encapsulate the range of human emotions both as part of living in the South African country and beyond its borders. Nevertheless, *Wistfulness of Time* offers a selection of poems and short stories that embody the theme of nostalgia and the idea of memory. From artists such as Petrus van Staden, Busisiwe Mahlangu, Janice Kudakwashe Mamukwa, Shaleen Jacobs, Thendo Netshivhera, Nivonne Jackson and many other students at the University of South Africa, this anthology was born, the first of many to come.

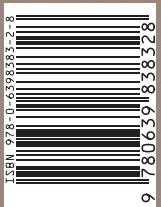
Despite the diversity of voices and the various depictions of the theme, these students have been successful in giving a voice to and describing the human condition. They are well on their way to carving their mark alongside the many great artists of South Africa and the world.

Wistfulness OF TIME

WORKS BY THE STUDENTS OF
UNISA'S BA IN CREATIVE WRITING

Edited by Caitlin Hancocks and Safiyya Jogee

Foreword by Alwyn Roux



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KSK Anthology

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Contents page

Poetry:	01
a trapped deer	02
Set me free	03
Sun Abuse to Spouse	04
Until Death	05
A Moment in Greenways	06
Kolmanskop	07
Die Gaucho van Buenos Aires	08
Bigger Picture	09
Sentiments of my memory	10
Butterfly Hearts	11
Wish You Were Here	12
Saudade	13
Pieces	14
I took an old man home once	15
Birthday Party II	16
12:01 am	17
Growing Memories	18
The Respite Endeavour	19
Living Memory	20
Droom/Werklikheid	21
Short Stories:	23
Nesting Place	24
The dog, the baobab tree and the boy	31
Pata Pata	39
The Bus Journey	44
Conversations with my father-in-law	51
Emigration	55
I'll Miss You	62
An Old Bond	68
Into the Portal	74
Little helpers	79
The Mountain	86
About the Authors:	92

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Foreword

During 2021, Unisa's Creative Writing students met online on a weekly basis as part of the "Writing Bus with Alwyn". These encounters contributed greatly to students being able to converse with each other about the most important principles of the three main genres they were working on: poetry, narrative, and drama. During these sessions, students also had the opportunity to learn from poet and publisher Nkateko Masinga, award-winning novelist Gerda Taljaard, and critically acclaimed playwright Tertius Kapp. Following these classes, students were inspired to create this anthology.

Caitlin Hancocks and Safiyya Jogee, two final year students, assisted me in compiling an anthology of student work written in 2021. We sent out a call for contributions for an anthology with the theme "Memories, Nostalgia, and the Future". We received no less than 55 contributions. From this, we selected 40 poems and short stories to be part of the editing phase, and finally decided to include 31 contributions in the anthology. The result is this wonderful anthology, *Wistfulness of Time*, which you are currently holding in your hands.

I hope that you will find as much delight in reading the pieces as I did; that you will be able to "write to the winds/ to give these words freedom" as Busiswe Mahlangu wishes in her poem "Set me free"; that you will "remember the days/ when affection flowed/ like streams of water" as Mpine Letlala writes in her poem "Butterfly hearts".

My heartfelt thanks to the editors, Caitlin and Safiyya. This project would not have been a success without the huge amount of work you have done. Also, thank you to the Department of Afrikaans and Theory of Literature at Unisa who provided us with funding to publish the anthology. Lastly, to my Creative Writing students of 2021, it was wonderful conversing with you on a weekly basis, and I wish you the best of luck with your writing careers.

*Alwyn Roux,
Pretoria, July 2022*

Poetry

a trapped deer

By Petrus van Staden

you weren't meant to be trapped, panting
for air, ensnared, unable to move or dare
a deer waiting for his hunter, knowing
your eyes twitching and panicked with despair

you weren't meant to be caged, helpless
hidden away inside, no sun or breeze
a deer waiting for his hunter, breathless
hopeless, no freedom for your eyes to see

i remember your eyes the day before
the flame they once had, withered and dim
i remember your smile, forced and sore

your mumbled hum difficult to ignore
as you felt the hunter, silent and grim
arrive to collect what he gave, and more

Set me free

By Busisiwe Mahlangu

I write to the wind
to give these words freedom

Here sister, take my tongue
and run to the light,
be careful of the blood,
I had to break my voice free
My story will be carried by your feet

Where I end. You begin,
where you end. A small girl begins

Here sister, take my eyes
they carry terror in them,
Do not be afraid,
These are warning shots of the evil -
a collection of sins performed against us
but I want you to know that beyond the torture
my dreams are burning the darkness

I wish you capture this sunlight
because it was made for your eyes.

Here sister, take my ears with you
They are a well of screams
They know all the waiting I've done to be seen.
They are an ocean of songs sung in whispers.
When you reach an open field,
sing the song of your happiness
with all the breath inside you,

I will listen for your freedom
and I will know that somewhere
the future is kind to us.

Sun Abuse to Spouse

By Thendo Netshivhera

Mighty in size, yet dwarf in mind.
Your deeds to spouse bring tears to eyes.
She cries and weeps, we take the whip
Like rebel slaves in old dark days.

In autumn, you nurture her smile with care.
She glows and shares her love across the earth.
She feeds us all with crops and fresh fine wine,
While we hope and pray that you stay, this time.

In winter, you leave your spouse in streams of tears.
Her grief then bursts like loud heaven thunders.
She tortures us with chills and muscle aches.
The thick blood rushes to keep warm our lungs.

In spring, you clear the skies and give her hope.
You give Earth some light, her soul sets alight.
Her anger melts, she arises in bliss.
She bursts into tears of joy; our dreams are mend.

In summer, she receives you with open arms.
She begs for your love like a pig in heat.
Little does she know you will soon shift tropics.
Seasons come and seasons pass, patience remains.

Until Death

By Kgotla Seitshiro

Once I carried
Flowers and gifts
And swore to
Put you first

For you were
The spark that
Reignited
The fire in me

Yet today you are a rose
Wilted by my wrath
A spirit comatose
Like a cadaver

Where your beautiful
Soul once resided
Is a lonely
Echo-filled cenotaph

I carry a scythe
And a wreath for roses
The equanimity of death
Is your only saving grace

A Moment in Greenways

By Almaaz Salie

The ground on which we lay was pebbled and frigid
Looked up at the polka dot sky, encased by a golden fortress
Your wisdom ever apparent as you pointed with your mittened hand
To a place far beyond your wildest dreams.

The ground in which you lay is pebbled and frigid
Looking down at the ground, surrounded by fragments
Your wisdom never lost, as I touch the monolith
Dreaming of a distant place, just out of reach.

Kolmanskop

By Mandia Bornman

Verpoeier in die skemer
die voorkop tot kopbeen;
opeis van vrugheid en vog.
Stil storm van stof
kom ruite verweer,
en stadig die ou koloniale gebou
tot beenwit sand verteer;

Geen tafel, geen bed
fasade verwring
tot naakte skelet.
'n Bleek steen roep in stil waardigheid uit,
maar onder die sand verdwyn 'n diamant.

Sy nageslag, stof van sy stof
sal hierdie monument verag.

Die Gaucho van Buenos Aires

By Shaleen Jacobs

Die Gaucho op sy perd jaag vry deur die vlaktes
Die skoon blou lug kyk neer op hulle
Die sterk pampaswinde probeer hulle inhaal, maar dis te verbete
Die Gaucho statig, sterk, jaag oor groen heuwels, verby
wakende standbeelde
Op soek na iets, na `n soeke van niks
In die hoop dat hy eendag iets sal vind
iets wonderbaarlik, iets onbeskryflik
iets waarna dromers, skrywers, en kunstenaars soek
Miskien is die antwoorde opgesluit in die Argentynse son, haar
kusse aggressief,
Soen weereens die bekende bruingebrande dele op sy lyf
Miskien is sy alewige gejaag maar net om die verlede te ontvlug
Miskien is sy gejaag net na die wind
Die toekoms dans die tango, in haar rooi kuitlengte rok,
So leer sy die dans van die lewe
Vir haar blinde pampaskind

Bigger Picture

By Robyn Waters

As I think of how my eyes are dead
And useless burdens in my head from birth,
In this world, cruel and dark, I question my worth.
“Nothing,” whispers a chilling voice in my head.
I should leave my hometown, to here, they said,
To a special new school! Where independence, you’ll learn
With the best teachers that could walk this earth!
Even with food to eat, and a warm bed.
And the worst of all were those wounds they made,
“In heaven, you will see,” they told me then,
They expect me to sit and wait
But they have no idea, my dreams will not fade ...
I still do not have an idea how, when,
they do not understand, I alone decide my fate!

Sentiments of my memory

By Jayde Carlyne Haupt

Nostalgia is a word
written in glitter
Fades faster than the eye can see.
A moment in time gone
Yet never forgotten to me.

Serendipitous never
A memory forever

A feeling created by scents
Smells cast spells which cause me to miss
The face of the boy who stole my first kiss
Nostalgia is a fairy
Who loves to dance and play
In my heart and in my mind
Upon the scars where my memories stay.

Butterfly Hearts

By Mpine Letlala

Under the gleeful yellow sun we existed
Free to love if but for a moment
Two teenagers drunk on love at first sip.

Our feeble bodies clutched tightly
Lingering
As if happily ever after was written in the sand

Rocking side to side swiftly
Keeping in step
With the whispers of the wind
His gentle caress on our sepia skins
Pressed together.

On our shoulders
We wore hearts
Freely
Watched them leap simultaneously
With childlike innocence
To their own pulsating rhythm

Remember the days
When affection flowed
Like streams of water
Before callousness and fear
Invaded our homes

Remember this teenage love affair once breathed
Once morphed
And spread its rainbow-coloured wings

If this world should catch fire
Remember you and I burned brighter
If the chains of human frailty should feel a little tighter
Remember how you and I were once free to sow the heights
With nothing but magic in our wings.

Wish You Were Here

By Robyn De Lange

Pieces of you lie scattered around,
In every room your presence is found.

Late night whiskeys and comfortable silence,
Winter mornings filled with whistling and guitar strings.

A gentle hand that was always tinkering,
Fireside stories with a mischievous glint,
These are the things that will surely be missed.

Months go past and they'll soon turn to years.
We'll all move forward,
Wishing you were here.

Saudade

By Safiyya Jogee

Eyes meet hers
fingertips worship her silhouette
lustful, learning, loving
the feeling overwhelms her

blood rushing, adrenaline pumping,
sweet, succulent, satisfying,
that ecstatic crescendo within reach
she can taste it, reaches for it

She searches him
peers into his core
frantically,
she looks.

He is lost,
melancholy consumes her -
he forgets her, forgets them and
chooses not to love her.

Distance departs them
longing lengthens
her only thought is
Saudade: the love that did not remain.

Pieces

By Chrisné Venter

pieces,
tiny little pieces - that together
only forms half a memory

is all I have left of drinking Iron
Brew on the backdoor step,
of eating freshly plucked peaches you sliced
up with your Swiss army knife,
of running through a garden of greens while talking;

talking so much, as if I already lived a full life
- but I was only two.

Then, looking back at you, trying to hold our
laughter as I pretended to fly -
Out of the blue, hearing that sweet harmonica sound,
that meant it's almost time to say goodbye.

That same harmonica now holds a special place in my room
and every time I see it -
It reminds me of the pieces, of a perfect day with you.

I took an old man home once

By Pumla Jafta

I took an old man home once
The cattle trail our compass,
Stones our bridges, as
We left the shores of Dwesa.
Led by our shadows to a night's rest
We kissed our yesterday goodbye
"Our finest hour of bravery, filled with fear,
Fighting for freedom."
War stories turned to stories of freedom.
No skirmishes or imprisonments
Weddings songs lulled us to sleep
On the banks of the river of forgiveness.
Led by the morning mist to his tomb,
Eager to meet his unknown,
Our prince rests his sword.
Yes, I took an old man home once.

In loving memory of Mluleki Max 'M' Jafta (31 August 1931 – 23 July 2016)

Birthday Party II

By Claire Louise Clift

We caused a jam outbound
We stood around the bonnet pluming smoke
Like the radiator, burnt out and laughing
By the time the sun set we were neck deep anyway,
In the water, wet and laughing
Writhing while the day drooped

After the night coffee and
After the dark and the drive to the city
I get home and tell Luci I'm feeling transformed
I jump into the water now again and alone
And I think
It's like that poet said
This is what it means to take your desire seriously

12:01 am

By Janice Mamukwa

The dream begets more
Dreams
Of sunny days untainted,
The nightmare speaks of
Futures
In stutters cramped with meanings ancient,
The sun bears down upon
Tomorrows
Unlighted, impatient

And my night is an unquiet wait for fate's intentions.

Growing Memories

By Nivonne Jackson

My knees have explored the world, and my palms remembered every texture,
My eyes only reflected delight or hurt,
And my mom was my biggest hero.
My childhood was full of confections, fragments, and family meals,
Full of grass stains on new garments,
And a new toy only lasted a few days.

My fingertips explored the world, and my feet remembered every road,
You can tell me nothing about desolation and drawbacks.
My eyes reflected more than delight or hurt,
There was vengeance, solitude, and bliss too.
My adolescence was full of new excursions to the discovery of myself,
Full of passion flecks on my pale skin,
And a new outfit only lasted a few evenings.

My mind explored the world, and my conviction remembered every fault,
You can tell me nothing about blunders and repentance.
My eyes reflected more than delight or hurt,
There was compassion, triumphs, and inanity too.
My twenties were full of self-regard, I opted myself for once,
Full of self-affection and belief I was,
And then a new me endured longer than a few days.

The Respite Endeavour

By Matthew Lance Kent

I lay at rest in a subconscious utopia,
Desperation, a child clinging to its mother's breast;
A thrush not yet ready to abandon its nest, so I resist.
Yet I must wake eventually. My fantasies purloined.

I raise my arms upward, my body a rising stage curtain;
Othello's personification ready to perform,
Awake and ever-present, lucid, and forlorn.
Reality: A frozen frail fragment of joy.

Living Memory

By Caitlin Hancocks

I love remembering, more than living,
but memory is often unstable;
change in the pattern of time misgiving.

The daydreams are only the beginning
of the invention I wish to enable.
I love remembering, more than living.

You said to alter history – splitting
verity – to think it reasonable
to change time's fixed pattern, is misgiving.

To understand you must be forgiving –
the straight timeline of being is fable.
I love remembering, more than living.

Sweeter than accepting is believing
nostalgia is reliable, and yet
changing time's pattern remains misgiving.

Fastened truths only lead to my grieving,
wondering if it was worth the trouble.
I love remembering, more than living,
though changing time's pattern is misgiving.

Droom/Werklikheid

Deur Rentia Weber

ek droom 'n werklikheid
'n seisoen, slaap
'n ritme

draai om, dag en nag, lê stil,

droom

in die wieg van die bed

begin die einde

'n werklikheid, droom ek

wat opstaan

konkreet en korrek
soos 'n kamer of kluis, wat aarsel
ek, spoeg
elke 'n uit.

sommer so, sonder geluid

droom ek 'n werklikheid

Short Stories

Nesting Place

By Tracy Cook

Her final breaths coincided with the harrowing cries of the bush babies. Their panicked shrieks emanated from the depths of the forest, after which the night turned silent. The locals had said that they had never heard anything quite like it, many had awoken and checked their clocks. 1:01 am. The exact time of death that was given by the hospital. Just like that, she was gone. In the days that followed, the unusually perfect summer weather laced with the carefree song of the birds was in complete contrast to the despair that clouded me. Somehow the sun still managed to come up, the birds still sang, and the sea continued to roar during its highest tide. Somehow, I was still alive. My life as I had known it, however, was not. The place where my grandmother had lived was the place I ran to whenever I needed to escape the world. The house, a simple fishing cottage, intended as a holiday house, had become the home of my grandparents after the unforeseen loss of their farm. I was too young to remember much of the farm, but from the little I had been told, I had deduced that there had been a fire and so my grandparents had left their home and settled in the little house by the sea. The simplistic cottage had been filled with what furniture remained. Fancy antique imbuia wood furniture wrenched away from the spacey farmhouse now filled a much smaller space. The only thing 'beachy' about their new house was the occasional basket or jar filled with shells, as well as the one lonely seascape hanging above their bed. But you knew you were close to the sea because you could almost always hear and smell it. Surrounded by coastal forest, nature encroached on the skirts of the house and often found its way inside with the odd snake slithering through an open door or rogue monkey raiding the ever-laden fruit bowl on the dining table.

With the passing of my grandfather, the beach house had homed only my grandmother and she had become the keeper of what we called The Beach. As the matriarch of the family, the place where she resided became the centre of the family and the centre of my universe.

The Beach consisted of her little house, as well as other cottages that were used as holiday homes. She was one of the few that chose to live there permanently, a local, living at house number 1. The houses were a short walk away from the sea and some distance further was the Tugela River mouth. This had been my playground as a child, with every school holiday spent there. In the summer I would be on the beach all morning—swimming, playing, and laughing with my cousins and friends who were also on holiday. In the winter months, The Beach was much quieter and our beach outings consisted only of walking and playing. My grandmother loved our visits, preparing the guest room for us and placing small vases of freshly cut flowers from the garden next to our beds. During every trip, I longed for the moment that I finally got to see her silver hair in the distance, waiting for us at the gate.

With the loss of my father, this is where we had run. I remembered that day clearly, my mother had been in a foul mood that afternoon when she fetched me from school. She was tired. My father's affair was practically common knowledge now, and their marriage continued dragging on as a result of his indecision. Even I knew that daddy was deciding on where he wanted to be and I had been doing my best to show him that home was the greatest option. I had been on my best behaviour but this had not stopped them from yelling at one another. I remembered how I had found out that we might not be an option for him anymore. I had witnessed an emotional one-sided telephone conversation where my mother had firmly told someone that my father was a married man with a child. I was used to listening to her on the telephone with my grandmother, usually taking the phone and continuing the conversation myself. But on this day when I asked, "Is that Ouma?" and tried to take the receiver from her, she had snatched it back and waved me away.

"Daddy is seeing someone else," my mother told me after she had put the receiver down and I'd asked who she was talking to.

"You didn't say goodbye," I had replied.

This seemed to confuse her, "To who?"

“To the person on the phone, you didn’t say goodbye.”

She had looked at me then with brimming watery eyes. “That’s because I’m sad. Daddy doesn’t love me anymore, he loves somebody else. He wants to be with somebody else.”

I didn’t know what this meant just yet and so I had placed my little palms on her cheeks and whispered, “I still love you, Mommy.”

This didn’t seem to make any difference, my mother only cried more. After that moment in the weeks and months that went by, my father continued to teeter between home and the unknown. Sometimes away for days, surprising us when he did come home. That is, until that fateful afternoon after school. When we arrived home, my mother had paced up and down between the kitchen and the lounge. I watched her from the floor of the sunny lounge as I coloured a ladybird, the smell of yesterday, today and tomorrow wafting in through the front door. She eventually disappeared into the kitchen and came back sometime later with big black bags. She marched to their bedroom with me in tow, watching in surprise as she began emptying my father’s clothing and belongings into them.

“What are you doing, Mommy?”

“I’m sorting out daddy’s clothes.”

“Can I help?”

“No, my love, I’m almost finished, and then I’ll make you dinner,” she seemed to break from a trance as she looked at me and smiled.

After her packing spree, she calmly made dinner. She didn’t want to eat and while I ate, she continually looked out the window towards the driveway. When she heard the whine of the gate opening and my father’s car pulling into the driveway, it was dark. She charged out snatching up the four black bags she had filled and placed them on the veranda.

“Choose!” she shouted at him as he neared the front door. “You need to choose, is it us or her? I can’t take this.”

My father had stared at her briefly with a pained expression on his face. Not looking at me, he gently shook his head and quietly began collecting the rubbish bags.

“Paul, you can’t do this. You have a child! You can’t just abandon her, she needs you. Please, don’t do this.”

The last part had been barely audible as she began to cry. The shock of seeing my mother cry again had made me cry. “Daddy, please don’t leave us. Where are you going?”

“I can’t live here anymore, I’m sorry.”

“Daddy, please.”

Our pleas were met with silence as he turned and walked away, the two of us clinging to one another sobbing breathlessly. There had been no further explanation, no promise of when we would see him again and no goodbye.

With tears streaming down her face, she packed our bags immediately afterwards, and we left in the pitch-black night to run away from the place where we had been abandoned. I knew where we were going, but at six years old and engulfed by tears I had succumbed to sleep on the back seat of the car. In the morning I was greeted by my favourite place. There was my grandmother, to hold my hand and erase the harsh memories of the previous night. In the weeks we spent there, the rip of sadness of my father leaving did not feel as jarring. Instead, we swam in the lukewarm sea and drew pictures in the sand. We ate naartjies while sitting on the heated sand looking out at the horizon, the fruit bursting and spraying us in the face. My mother was present but didn’t always take part in our activities. She often wouldn’t even hear when I was talking to her. She’d stare out into the garden, her eyes puffy and red. My grandmother kept me busy. She took me into the garden and showed

me butterflies and insects, sometimes placing dung beetles in my hand which would make me shriek happily when they began walking, their spiky legs prickling my palm. In the mornings we ate porridge on the front veranda under the giant-leaf fig tree, the ripened figs plopping onto the ground. In the afternoons we took tea and biscuits on the back veranda under the shade of the jackalberry. Here we would watch the tinker barbets drinking at the stone birdbath and sitting happily in the wild dagga. We spent a lot of the time baking together and on any given day the smell of baked biscuits or cakes was mixed with the scent of the salty sea air.

My grandmother would feed the bush babies every night; every afternoon we would stand in the kitchen together and cut up little pieces of apple and banana. She would place the fruit on a wooden board attached to the fig tree over the veranda and then we would wait for them to come. During the evening while we were either watching TV, cooking dinner, or sitting outside breathing the night air, they would arrive. Sometimes there would be only one and other nights there would be three or four, picking the fruit up with their hands and gorging themselves. And then before bed, when my mother was already asleep, she would sit on my bed and tell me stories. She would make them up as she went. Every night I would fall asleep lulled by the sound of the sea and the sound of her voice, comforted by the warmth of her sitting at the foot of my bed. I heard many stories while I was there. My favourite was the one about the bush babies – where the young bush baby fell from its nest and was separated from its parents during a storm. The next morning after the storm had passed, the baby was reunited with its mother and father and all was well again. This became a story told over and over, each time slightly different because it wasn't told from a book, but I didn't mind. The ending was always the same – night after night the baby was always reunited with its parents in the morning. I imagined them snuggled together in their giant nest made of leaves overlooking the river as my grandmother had described.

“Is daddy going to visit here?” I had asked one night when the story had failed to put me to sleep.

"I don't know, my lovey, he hasn't said," she replied as she stood to tuck me in. She moved the hair from my face with her sun-spotted hand before kissing my forehead.

"Will he be there when we get home?"

She remained silent before speaking. "I don't know but you must remember that no matter what, you have your mom and you have me, okay?"

"Okay, but is mommy also going to go away later?"

"No, my love. Your mom isn't going anywhere."

"What if she also starts loving someone else?"

"Your dad stopped loving your mom, not you. She's not going to leave you."

"But daddy did."

"Daddy is different," she said as she sat back down. "Hey, how about I come back to your house when you go home? Does that sound nice?"

When we got home the house was cold, dark, and mildewy. An empty shell with my ladybird picture still lying on the carpet untouched. The flowers of the yesterday, today and tomorrow were long gone but the thrill of having my grandmother in my space overrode the disappointment that greeted me. I had brought some of The Beach home with me in the form of shells and stones which sat next to my bed. Every night, for another month, I heard the bush baby story. Afterwards, if I hadn't fallen asleep, I would ask if my father would be coming home that evening. I eventually knew which answer to expect and stopped asking. The ending to my story was going to be different.

Twenty years later, I felt six again.

“Pulmonary embolism”, the doctor had said, “a blood clot blocked an artery in one of her lungs. There was nothing anyone could have done.”

It had happened so suddenly, there was no time for goodbye. Standing in the empty confines of my grandmother’s home, her life knitted into the walls, I found her cause of death ironic. She had breathed life into The Beach. I could still hear the fading echoes of the classical music that she loved softly playing against the sound of the sea. I could smell her hairspray and perfume embossed on the linens. The deafening ticking of her clock reminding me of time moving forward, progressing without her. I had never felt such a severe emptiness. I diligently fed the bush babies each night. Generations had passed through the branches of the giant fig, but they did not come. In the days that followed I turned to nature for comfort, there was meaning everywhere. The sound of the diderik cuckoo calling incessantly, butterflies bouncing on the honeysuckle, or the booming of toads from her pond. She was everywhere. But after all this time I realised it was not the place I was running to, it had been her. She was my soft landing, my compass, my nesting place.

The dog, the baobab tree and the boy

By Janice Mamukwa

Spotty II was brought home on 12 March, 1991. He was little and timid, and he didn't have any spots on him at all like Spotty I. His meekness, it was thought, would spare him the fate of Spotty I, who had rather imprudently and regularly enjoyed the adventure of playing catch with the Peugeot's tyres. Spotty II wasn't as fun as his predecessor, but a boy will make do with even the least enthusiastic ball comrade if he can have a constant companion that follows him everywhere, and never has a harsh word or a raised fist for him.

It turned out Spotty II's meekness was the result of a bad worm infestation. Only a few days after the mother had brought Spotty back from a visit to the vet, the puppy had found his appetite for kibble and life, and was soon bounding clumsily around the garden, running after the boy he was already devoted to. Spotty soon discovered that his favourite human could not always be there to play with him or stroke his belly. He learned that on some days, the boy would pat him on the head and then leave home, only to return hours later, just as the smell of him was fading from the latch on the gate at the end of the driveway. After days of this routine, Spotty learned to intuit when it was time for the boy to come home, and he would sit patiently waiting for him at the gate each day, ready to be reunited with his packmate.

For the boy, the days grew sunnier, now that he had a best friend and confidante waiting for him when he came home from school. Depending on how his day had been, he would either hug Spotty or run with him all the way up the drive to the house or sometimes, just say a quiet "hey boy" and trudge slowly on the long way to the front door with him close behind. They would play all day until the father came home. Then the boy would have to leave the dog outside. The father worked very hard all day and preferred not to be disturbed in the evenings at home.

That meant the boy had to be quiet at the supper table because silence was all the father required of him. Of Spotty II, he required the art of making himself scarce.

Sometimes, the father would return home swaying and loud, and the mother would tell the boy to go and hide in the low hills behind their house. With Spotty by his side, he was not afraid of the crawling sounds of the bush. Dog and boy kept each other safe. They would sit there for hours, watching as the sun died behind the hills, waiting for the mother to come and call them in. They would fall asleep together leaning against their own baobab tree, the dog's warm belly a comfort to the boy. The mother would look tired and red-eyed when she finally came to get them, but she would manage a smile to reassure them.

As both boy and dog grew older, the father's rages became more frequent. By age eleven, the boy felt old enough to speak up in defence of the mother, the alpha that cared for and protected him and Spotty. When the father came home early one day, ready to unleash a boiling rampage on anyone in the way, the boy knew it was time. He'd heard the yelling and he ran to find the mother shrinking between the sink and the kitchen table. As the father was slamming a fist on the table and knocking to the floor a colander full of freshly washed green beans, the boy let out a small gasp of "leave her alone". Like a fighting bull incensed, the father turned on his son, his head bending down almost touching the top of the boy's.

"What did you say?" he bellowed over the boy, spraying spittle like poison in his face.

"I-I said," the boy stuttered, "leave her alone!"

The father's eyes seemed to roll in his head, threatening to fall out. The mother had rushed to stand between them, trying to shield her son from what would surely come next. But the boy slipped out from behind his mother to protect her instead. The boy stood as straight as he could, shoulders square, fists tight and cried, "Pick on someone your own size!" First, silence came from the father. Then a rumbling that might have

come from the belly of the earth, laughter that soon turned into a roar. There was a slap to the side of the head. And then a knock to the ground. "You think you're my size?" He screamed, as if injured himself, "huh, boy," he followed this with another slap, "are you my size now?"

The boy didn't answer, he was scrambling to his feet when he was met with a kick in the stomach. And another. And another. And then the kicking stopped, and there was a hoarse cry from his father, pain and surprise colouring his face. There was Spotty, teeth closed around the father's right calf, pulling hard. As the father dropped to his knees, the mother did her duty, calling and soothing Spotty, gently tugging on his collar until he had let go. Spotty growled softly, comforting himself, licking his lips in frustration but no longer baring his teeth. Panting came from everyone in the room, the mother still holding onto Spotty's collar. Recovering, the father got to his feet, grabbed a yelping Spotty by the scruff of the neck and carried him out of the room, the mother and son begging and screaming in protest after him. He shoved them aside and burst through the front door, out into the night.

In the morning, he was back without Spotty, and the boy never saw him again.

Time is a circle. There are no leading ends, no back-ends, no start, or finish. No point in time is more important than the other. They all just co-exist. For me, time is happening all at once. Right now, I see a little boy running to the bush, running to take shelter beneath my bare branches. His little dog follows and curls up next to him. They press against my belly, and we warm each other. It is winter again. The boy's eyes are made glass by his tears. He frowns through the tears repeating, "I hate him, I hate him so much."

I also see eight years curved away from now. I see a man, the boy's father, coming to me on a dry October night when the moon is high and bright. He stands and stares at me, at my trunk, at my branches, but it is not me he is focused on. He runs his palm and fingers against my bark as his

mind drifts far away from me. Closing his eyes, he whispers to me and to the gods of all his dreams. He says he knows he is lucky to have this life and to be with this woman. He prays that he will be worthy of it all. He prays for the child that is still inside the woman. He says, "No one ever taught me to be a father. Please let me be a good one. Please show me the way. Please let this baby be the best of me."

Then I see the boy, now a man, leading the man, now old, to my shade. The young man helps the old one sit down. The big man has never seemed so small. I watch them sit in their pain.

In another time I see a young girl with scratch-marks on her knees, skipping and running to me. A young dog barks and pants after her and they both collapse beneath me. The girl laughs and stares up at my branches. She tells me secrets I will keep safe for her. The dog is already sleeping, and the girl closes her eyes too. We breathe out together, exhaling the past and the future, and we take a rest in each other's company.

I'm the kid who wasn't supposed to make it. Not make it out of that house or make it in this world. After all, I have the same story of a lot of unsuccessful people. I had a father I was afraid of and a mother I wished all my life would leave him, but never would. As a child I was fed a regular diet of anger, fear, and self-doubt. My father made sure that my inner voice, the voice that's supposed to be on my side, said all the hateful things he would like to say to me.

But then one day I made a friend. My mother had always insisted she felt safer with a dog around when she was at home alone, even if it wasn't a particularly big dog. My father must have grudgingly known my mother never asked for much, and that the moments he could do something to make her happy were rare. So, we got a "guard dog", a little Jack Russell-type mongrel. We called him Spotty after the dog in a children's story I was reading at school. He was your typical happy-go-lucky puppy, curious about everything, not old enough to be afraid of

anything. He had no idea that he needed to be afraid of my father's car when my father was in a rage and would reverse without warning and without looking behind him. That's how badly he had needed to go get a drink the day he ran Spotty over. I had never had a dog before, or even known anyone who had died. But watching my mother cry as she dug the hole to bury him – that was my first childish understanding of grief. After a few weeks, or maybe months later, we got a new puppy. No one told us it was bad luck to name a dog after one that had died, so we called the puppy Spotty in tribute. The new dog wasn't as easy-going as the first one. He wasn't as eager to please. A shy little thing, I wondered if he also had a mean father. I was so determined to be friends with the dog, I even fell asleep outside once, next to his kennel. I was sure he must have been lonely even if he pretended he didn't need company. If you prove to a dog you're there for the long haul, they reward you with unmatched loyalty. My commitment paid off and after a few weeks Spotty wouldn't leave my side.

It sounds dumb to say my best childhood friend was a dog. Like a bad cliché. But that was the truth. That little dog had a big heart, and he got me through some of the worst times I went through. I can't remember when it was that my dad started beating me. Sure, I always got the belt whenever I did something naughty or got a bad grade at school. But at some point, the old man decided I was old enough to take the odd punch or two to the gut. Ma would shield me as much as she could. She'd even make me run and hide out in the bush whenever she thought he might be in the mood for a fight. I guess she must have taken the brunt of his anger herself.

As much as we'd had enough of the anger, it sure must have been getting to Spotty. One night he attacked my father. Bit him pretty good, too. And that was it. My dad took the dog away and we never saw him again. I'm not ashamed to say my heart broke that day. But I am ashamed to say I didn't ask my father a single question about where Spotty was. I didn't throw a tantrum, I didn't cry. I didn't want my father to have the satisfaction. So, I said nothing, and I buried my grief in a box inside my head. I never expected to open it ever again.

Not long after Spotty was taken away, the beatings increased and I was sent to live with my aunt and her husband for “a little while”, and Ma promised to follow soon. But soon was a vague deadline and she ended up staying with him. My aunt and uncle didn’t have any children of their own, so they loved having me there. They were wealthy and they lived in a nicer town with better schools, so it was decided it was for the best for me to stay with them. At least that was the excuse. Living with my aunt was the best thing for my education. That was supposedly the only reason my parents couldn’t have me around. And in the holidays, I was the one dodging their company. There was always something; a boy scout camp, science camp, a vacation with school friends – anything to avoid my father.

And I thrived in those years. I did well at school. I had plenty of friends, even if I didn’t have a dog. I even went on to university. When I met Sara my first week on campus, I saw a whole life in front of me. A life I never would have dared ask for. Sara was my version of perfect. She had such a lightness about her; when she laughed it was open and full, when you told her a story, you were the only person that existed to her in that moment. It wasn’t hard to fall in love. We got married right after graduation. We got good jobs, found our first home and we had our first child. Things happened that way in those days. You put the work in, and you got something out of it.

When Samantha, our oldest, was born, I learned a whole new kind of love. All I wanted was to be a good dad and protect my daughter. And when Samantha was asked what she wanted for her sixth birthday she said, with the same open expression her mother always had, “I want a puppy.” I got my little girl a pet rabbit instead. She adored the rabbit, but the dog idea wasn’t going away. It was the only thing I couldn’t bring myself to give her.

Sara didn’t understand, I had never told her about my childhood dog. She knew our family had a complicated history but for the most part we didn’t talk about it. But she must have figured there was something more to the dog issue. So, for the first time she pressed. And pressed. We argued like all couples do sometimes, but this argument was different.

I felt a rage bubbling inside me that I usually never let myself feel. And then I broke down in tears. I'd never cried as an adult. Men are expected to maintain their composure, right? But I was just bawling uncontrollably on the floor. I couldn't breathe, it felt like the walls were coming down on me and I was going to die. The doctor said that's what a panic attack was. He recommended therapy.

Instead, I went home to visit my parents. When I got there, I said to my father, "I need to talk to you." He usually avoided making eye contact with me, but it was as if he knew this was coming. Like he'd been waiting for this all these years. We went for a walk in the bushy fields behind our house. I used to run that route to get away from my father and now here we were, walking it side by side. We came to an old baobab tree and sat down in the shade. My father sat quietly, and I talked at him for a while. I told him the truth of my life, how much I had been afraid of him as a boy, how much I had hated him. How I couldn't understand being such a monster to your own child. My eyes were strewn with tears, but I kept on. And he just sat there and took it. My mother had once told me I should let go of my anger towards my dad. "By the time you find the courage to confront him he'll be an old man and you won't want to anymore," she'd said, "you'll just feel sorry for him."

But I didn't feel sorry for him. I felt sorry for my daughter, that she had a father who'd been broken long before her birth. I felt sorry for my wife, that she loved a man who couldn't open up to her. I felt sorry for myself. And then, I felt sorry for Spotty. And my yelling at my father turned into my own confession. A confession of my own guilt.

"He trusted me. He trusted me to take care of him. And I let him down," I wailed, "I should have fought for him, I should have tried harder."

I stopped when I realised my father had his arm around me. I couldn't remember being held in his arms before that. He was swaying me, comforting me.

"You were just a boy, you were just a boy," he kept saying.

I realised he was crying too, in his own gruff way.

“I’m sorry son,” he said, his voice trembling, “I’m so, so sorry.”

He didn’t need to say what he was sorry for. I felt I had opened that long-buried box of grief inside me and my father of all people, was helping me excise it. Grieving for a little dog with a big heart. Grieving for the little boy I had once been. That day, we left that grief, our grief, with the baobab tree. And it became a place we would visit a few more times to talk, to vent, to laugh and cry, until one day, my father passed away. I didn’t stop going to the tree though. I showed my daughter it was a place she could spend time with her dad. A place she could be alone when she needed solitude. We ended up getting her a dog after all and I hear her running out there to the tree with him whenever we visit my mother. I wonder if her daughter will do the same one day. And if she’ll have a dog by her side when she does.

Pata Pata

By Noluthando Mokoena

In the midst of preparing a serene milieu for a new chapter, a melody whose every note and beat bore intricate details of their late father's pata-pata dance routine was gently carried by the winds, and through the frames it subtly penetrated. It could've been any other melody, but not this one, this one was too familiar, it invaded an old wound that surprisingly, and after all these years, could still be felt. It stripped away the alleged badge of progress they wore proudly. And it was uncomfortable, so they silently prayed it away. *God, please no*, but as the stranger drove further down, layers of mutilated innocence began to unravel.

Under the spell of the melody Aviwe's silhouette was captured, twirling and swaying quite uncertainly, but before it came to an abrupt stop, her hand violently clutched the back of her neck, while the other blindly glued itself to her waist, her knees bent three times, and the gawky routine resumed again. In her own corner, Aphiwe descended to her feet, to hand the floor an overflowing tray that was unevenly tilted with pastel warm grey oil paint. The now diamond shaped carrier allowed a gracious amount of paint to cover her shoe; she didn't notice much. She leaped to the leaning tower of boxes, jerking her head back and arranging her facial features to all meet as closely as they could in the centre of her face. Her eyebrows looked like a bumpy long black road that's above the surface of unknown colourful objects. While everything else was motionless, her mind was pacing and scanning the arrangement, her eyes joined in the search for a box labelled "MEMORIES". ME...ME...SHOES, no...ME...ME...MEMORIES! YES!

From the box, she pulled out a rustic timber that had been carefully manipulated to resemble a twisted rope with small roses emerging between the fine threads. She ran her fingers on each corner of the frame, and across the glass that preserved an old photograph embedded with countless memories.

Remember to check all your mirrors and blind spots before strapping on the seat belt. What good is it to be safe, but not know what's near or behind you? And if you spot a car travelling at a speed higher than yours approaching from behind, don't try to speed up, but slow down and give it room to pass by. Mirrors are important, they reflect immediate surroundings, always believe them, acknowledge what they tell you, and make decisive decisions based on what you see.

It's like living a life without reflecting, and acknowledging any events from your past, or even worse, racing away from doing such. Nothing is as intrusive as the past, and the more we run, the more momentum it gains, and when it finally hits, it consumes everything. When you see it approaching, don't speed up, slow down and make acquaintances with it. Now, let's get going...

Though her hands were shaking, feet cold, and heart racing, she was able to store these gems from her father, and they played on. Soon her face disfigured, and all that pressed powder couldn't resist the effect of heated tears flowing nonstop. The facial demolition began to mirror the internal destruction. The woman-made wall built to prevent the past from ever creeping into the present was caving in.

She fought through hurt, and betrayal to construct and articulate the entire sentence. She had never been this vulnerable towards anybody since those incidents.

"You always wondered why I was never excited to see mom's friend, uJohn at our house...I think I am ready to tell you why..."

Aviwe's failed dancing attempts stopped as she raced to hug her sister, and while in her arms she whispered, "I know, that's why I was also tortured by Piet's visits."

She drew away slowly, and showed Aviwe the photograph in her hand.
“Look who I found!”

Aviwe jumped up and down to control her tears from gushing out, but ended up bashing the floor with her palms and calling for her father.

“Tata! Tata! Tata!”

Aphiwe reached down to her sister, “Don’t make the poor guy guilty for leaving us.”

They sat on their new couch that was thoroughly covered with plastic and an old fleece blanket they used to share. And Aphiwe tried to comfort her sister.

“I am so sorry for what we went through, we deserved none of it.”

Aviwe nodded and continued to poke the air while sobbing.

“None of that nonsense would’ve happened if he was there Phiwe, his absence created a state of destitute for us, we were preyed on, and his wife, our mother was the main instigator.”

While Aphiwe glared into space and pondered heavily, she said, “That house was once treasured with beautiful memories, but now, I can’t bring myself to think of any, not even one.”

Suddenly Aviwe burst into laughter, “Do you still remember the actual day we escaped?”

Aphiwe slowly recollected her thoughts, as though she’d forgotten a couple of details. Her stillness slowly changed and became a wide smile, accompanied by a roar of laughter.

“No babe, that day was hectic!”

Their evening chores had just been completed, and their backpacks were fully loaded. It was time. Aphiwe had the responsibility to keep tabs on their mother and when she was nowhere in sight, that's when they'd run away. So, she casually sneaked to the kitchen while examining every movement in the house; to her surprise, their mother's bedroom door was closed, and she assumed she was asleep already. Aphiwe then triumphantly twirled all the way to their bedroom, and after a short while they dashed out. As they turned the corner of the house, their mother was midway through the passage.

Instantly, their bodies became frozen cold, but a mutual surge of courage overcame them, and they sprinted towards the gate one foot after the other. Their mother awkwardly stretched herself to grab both girls, but she tumbled down before they even got to her. The few neighbours who were still outside marvelled at the sight, and wondered what was going on. The street light was situated at the corner, so it was very difficult to see the activities in the yards of other neighbours, unless they could afford to have outside lights for the passage or front area of the yard.

The girls became clearly visible once they had jumped the gate and were on the street. The further away they ran from home, the freer they felt. At that instant, they each became pregnant with jubilation, and no sense of fear or anxiety had the potential to make them doubt their decision, or cower away from what life had in store for them. They ran with victory and determination, overcoming every hurdle that street had on its path.

"I'm so proud of how far we've come Phiwe, from the minute we moved in to our first apartment as teenagers, until now. We're business partners, and so much more, and no matter what life threw at us, we have never changed or forsaken each other."

"I'm proud too, Viwe. So much has happened to us, but we're still here

together and I wouldn't have it any other way because life would be so impossible without you."

It was official, their relationship reached a new level of intimacy. Neither of them had ever imagined that a day would come where each had to lay her own burden before the other to see. The fear of vulnerability haunted them for years, the only solution known to them was to always run away from their past instead of facing it. That day they realised that running away fastened them tighter to their pain, when they sought to free themselves from it.

The room was filled with peace, no pain, no fear, no secret and no hurt. From the depths of their belly, happiness roared and echoed throughout the room. In the midst of this tranquil setting, their past settled comfortably as a guest.

The car drove up the street again, and the melody hit their ears, BUM BUM BUM BA DUM BUM BUM...

"Come on, let me show you the steps, I'll be mom and you'll be dad," said Aphiwe.

Aviwe eagerly jumped off the couch as Aphiwe counted down the steps. "One-Two! One-Two! Go...Aiybo!"

The Bus Journey

By Jennifer du Plessis

I stare out of the window as I have for the last hundred bus rides. I know the route, and the regulars like me who are all on their way somewhere. It's early – the sun is barely creeping out beyond the horizon.

There is a slight murmur in the air from those that dare to speak. Some have become friends over the years and talk eagerly among themselves, seemingly impervious to the morning's ache. I am too tired to partake in the early morning din, so I separate myself from the others.

The indigo sky of the dawn is fading quickly as the sun's yellow face peeks over the horizon. The shadows of the trees hurry past, and the darkness recedes rapidly. I watch the age-old dance as I always do, slight discomfort gnawing at me with the breaking of the morning.

I suppose I have always felt this tinge, ever since I can remember. Now it is more evident, a sensation burying in my gut that draws memories of comfort up as a means to counter it. An uninvited flash penetrates my mind: my father sits beside me, holding me close to his chest as we talk with uninhibited honesty into the morning hours. They were heart-to-hearts that found us when we least expected them to, in moments when we often could not afford to stay awake so long, when there were tasks that needed completing the following day. The spontaneity caught us, so it was impossible to avoid. Those are the moments I long for now, I realise. My tinge of disappointment over the morning is no longer just regretting being awake – it's nostalgia for another lifetime.

There is comfort in normality, in routine. At least, that's what everyone keeps telling me. The monotony is evident and often boring, but it no longer gets to me as it used to. My evening shifts distract me from my trauma and sleeping the day away counters all the intrusive thoughts. I fight to feel comfortable. It's all that matters now.

The route home always passes the highway sign, a road the bus doesn't take but that always catches my eye. Before he fell sick, he had a love for driving long distances, road trips for no real reason and blaring music over his Mercedes speakers. We used to sing out of tune to songs we barely knew any words to, laughing and telling jokes, just for the hell of it. His heart was so strong then. His will too.

The past year succeeded in making me invisible to the naked eye. Grief rendered me small with its initial shock and I suppose I ultimately just faded away. I don't consider it anymore, so normal has it become to be still and exist with singular breaths that do their best to keep me alive. The memories are overwhelming this morning. Tears well in my eyes and I blink them away in an attempt to avoid unwanted attention.

In the world beyond me, a memory begins to take shape. The wind whips through his hair as it whips through the trees now. We are laughing as we walk along a sandy beach, cursing at nature's elements and the inconvenient timing. My dress floats up and I have to press it down quickly while simultaneously attempting to brush the hair from my face.

His laughter is contagious, and he tells me, "I think the wind is flirting with you."

We find a place to sit, and he pulls a cigarette from his shirt pocket. The flame dies on his lighter before it has a chance to live, and soon enough he forgoes the effort.

To-go coffee aromas fill my nostrils, and the beach memory slips into an impromptu morning breakfast. I'm going to be late for work, but he patiently sips at his coffee and butters his toast. I think on the wonders of spontaneity and revel in this moment, taking a breath to appreciate the coffee scents that linger in the air. I envy his lack of structure but together we enjoy freedom.

It's different now. I hardly consider spontaneity or structure anymore. Lately my only goal has been to carry myself from one moment to

the next.

These memories surprise me with their intensity, and I realise that it's been a while since I've let myself ponder the past. They are uninhibited demons resurfacing after three-hundred odd days of suppression. There isn't anything I can do to stop the tears from falling and blinking only serves to let them fall faster. I am shaking as I try to maintain my composure, a challenge I haven't had before. I cry softly, desperate to maintain dignity, yet simultaneously unashamed. I have no control over any of this, after all.

The window in my vision is blurry, blocking out the familiar scenes as the route ambles on. For the first time, I don't know where we are or how far I am from home. It all seems immaterial.

I stop fighting the memories and let them flood in.

His ice-blue eyes fix on mine, and he smiles.

"Congrats, my girl!" he exclaims in elation and hugs me with such force I can't breathe.

I hold my matric results in hand and can't believe that my school journey has come to an end. I feel sad, but he smiles so brightly, so proudly, that I can't help but beam up at him.

We sit on the back porch of our house looking up at the stars and he recounts a memory from my childhood.

"When you were about five years old, I taught you about the moon and its Sea of Tranquillity. I remember, we were visiting Uncle Peter one weekend and, just as it was getting dark, you popped yourself onto his lap. 'Uncle Peter, can you tell me about the Sea of Tranquillity?' you said. He nearly fell off his chair, so taken aback was he by your question!"

And I laugh until I can't breathe as I envision the scene. Even now, a small, choked chuckle escapes me.

I hear it all, see it all, feel it all with every passing second.

Then he is telling me that I'm selfish and that I don't think about anyone but myself. I see his scowl of disapproval. His anger bites at me and I shrink back into my chair, hating every second of his torture.

"I asked you one thing, and that was to be here when I got back. Where were you?"

I offer an excuse that he doesn't accept, something like an errand, or a friend or whatever triviality I'd rendered important. I'd mistakenly thought I'd only be out for a moment, but my time had somehow been consumed.

"You know how busy my day is! If you're not here to help me when I ask you to be, how can I rely on you?"

My jaw quivers. I begin to cry.

"I'm sorry," I choke, feeling his disappointment run through me like the blood in my veins.

His tirade continues a few moments more and I have to apologise a lot before he lets me walk away. Later that night we find our way back into casual conversation and dinner in front of the TV, the lightning and thunder in his demeanour dissipated as sudden as the storm had rolled in. He doesn't make a comment about the earlier conversation, and even though I know in my heart that he had overreacted, no apology would slip from his proud mouth. No, the normalcy of the night that wraps around us is enough of an apology for now.

As I sit here in this bus, I am unashamed of his behaviour. I harbour no regrets, because even when it was difficult, he was always on my side. I could always count on him for a word of advice or a shoulder to cry on. I know he loved me, which counts for everything in the world.

Every good thought, every bubble of laughter, every moment of peace

and conflict, I recall. I reminisce until I can't breathe from my congested nasal cavities, until my temples throb from dehydration.

I miss him. It's the single most heart-wrenching feeling that penetrates me. I'm forced to feel it all, and as the bus ride draws to a close, I find myself utterly numb.

It stops somewhere in the last few kilometres home, the sobbing. I hide my tear-stained features behind my hair, hoping that no one can see me. I continue to deem myself invisible, ignoring the people that pass me as they climb off. I feel like burying myself in the ground, but I am too exhausted to feel embarrassed.

When the bus stops, a few metres from the street in which I live, I get up, gather my things and shuffle towards the exit. My face is slowly forgetting the tears that drowned it moments earlier, my blocked nose finally allowing merciful breaths. The stickiness of my cheeks is also seemingly subsiding.

The air is cool against my skin as the spring air breathes freshness into the world around me. The sun has almost completely risen. Soon its light will illuminate the world around me, and yet another aimless day will begin.

A part of me feels as though I will never be whole again. Thinking back to the lifeless body lying on that thankless hospital bed, I can only feel that the world is selfish to take him away from me so soon. It doesn't feel right, I feel cheated out of a life with him. I also feel guilty that there wasn't anything more I could do – a second more of my time, one more precautionary measure, anything at all! But I'd done everything I could. I knew it on a rational level. It did nothing for my arrhythmical heartbeats, or the emotions that I try to avoid every day.

I don't have tears left to cry.

The morning is peaceful, the breeze wafting soothingly around me

and between locks of my hair. It carries with it the scent of cigarettes and coffee, a morning routine I used to know too well. Of course, as I pass the house from which the aromas emanate, it's not my father I see standing on the front porch. For a moment I expect to, so the reality of the stranger catches me off-guard.

The man looks to be my age, with dark curls brushing against the nape of his neck. I don't recognise him, but then, I doubt whether I would have noticed him before.

Somewhere in the distance, a small dog begins to yip annoyingly. Slowly it winds up the entire neighbourhood's pack of pups, and chaotic persistent howling ensues. It's simply just another mark of the morning, I think to myself as I wander the last steps home.

When the alarm clock screams me into consciousness that night, I awake with seeming complacency. I open my eyes without a scowl. I don't crave the taste of coffee on my tongue to propel me into motion. In fact, I'm not nearly as tired as I must have been every day for the past year. I feel really well-rested.

Beneath the warm drops of the shower head, I scrub myself back to humanness, lathering soap all over my rejuvenated skin. I let the water wash over me, cleansing me of this morning's sadness that somehow feels so far away. I succeed in putting it all behind me, and I realise that I am overcome with an unknown peace.

I dress, eat and ready myself for my bus ride, as I've become so used to doing. This evening is different though. I feel... relieved.

As I take to the street, the dark of the early evening hours has begun to render the street deserted. Sounds erupt from houses as family's tuck into homemade dinners and ready the children for bed. The rest of the world will soon be asleep, and the day will end for many suburban residents. Mine is only just beginning.

The smoking man from this morning stands on the front porch, his figure almost a precise copy of before, a cigarette intermittently drawing to his lips. The scent of tobacco is less pungent, but I can still sense it in the distance between us. I catch myself watching him when he smiles at me and am tempted to break eye contact and flee, so awkward do I feel for staring. But I don't. I smile back at him, and he offers a wave.

The bus arrives on time, as it usually does. The familiarity of the steps is somehow replaced with a strange sensation as I make my way onto the bus. Only the regular handful of people make up the commuters tonight, most of who are on their way home. I make my way down the aisle to my regular seat, but when I pause there to sit down, it no longer feels right. I move on, inching closer to where the others sit.

I lift my head to nod a greeting at them, which they all return politely. We don't exchange words, but their presence is loud around me, a positive orb of energy that I have accidentally wondered into. I've seen these same few people on this same bus every day for years and this is the first time I've ever noticed it.

I suppose time is funny that way. One day the world is a hurricane and the next the bluest, brightest sky.

I think on my father and how I used to call him padre, which he had scoffed at as it made him feel like a priest. I recall him calling me sweetie, even when he got terribly annoyed with me - it was a name I knew better than my own.

Outside, the night sky is cloudless, and the stars blink profusely. I know that he's up there somewhere, watching down on me. It's just something I feel.

I feel calm.

High above me, a star glows dazzlingly brighter than those around it.

Good evening, dad.

Conversations with my father-in-law

By Pumla Jafta

For a man very shy of the podium, my father-in-law shared a great deal of wisdom and affection in his one-on-one conversations. Remembered for his trader's tales, I am privileged to share some of our conversations to mark his 90th birthday.

The day after my traditional wedding, I was in the kitchen unsure if I can even try to put together breakfast for the homestead was still abuzz with wedding guests. My father-in-law appeared at the door holding a sheep by its horn. He told me that with that sheep he is welcoming me to the family, and I may eat whatever I want and walk wherever I want. The unwritten rule book for Xhosa brides carries many dos and don'ts regarding garments to be worn, foods one can and cannot eat and where one can freely walk in the homestead. I noticed in this one-on-one ceremony that my father-in-law had already forgotten my new name that was given to me by my mother-in-law at the ceremony the previous day. This gentleman does not sweat the small stuff, I loved him immediately. I would be called '*mfazi*' as he addressed the fairer species from age one to a hundred.

The following day I left Lurwayizo to begin my married life with my husband some seventy kilometres away in a small town called Willowvale. He visited us from time to time and I noticed that our conversations were sprinkled with jest and laughter. If in town for his personal business, he took time to visit and find out how we were coping in our new shop.

His first question was always, "*Bayangena kodwa Mfazi?*" (Are the customers coming in at all?) He never tried to influence how we did things in our new shop yet in his genteel manner he would find out if all was good with staff, customers, and suppliers.

"Never run out of baby medicine. It will give you customers for a lifetime."

“Don’t let those travelling salesmen bully you into buying their dead stock.” He sounded the right warnings at the right time.

Our business had its ups and downs. We were situated quite far from the buzz of the taxi and bus rank, and we struggled to get customers. So, we opened daily for twelve hours, seven to seven. The staff rotated and took their mandatory leave days, but as family, we stayed on and kept the show on the road. Often, he would join us and even ‘bum’ stock for his own shop. As I write these memories, what I remember is that he came to visit chatted, read the newspaper, and bought goodies for his dear wife.

Our initial four years we spent in a village that was a stone’s throw away from the kingdom of the Xhosas, Nqadu Great Place. Our first-born child was a boy whom I left in the care of a nanny while I was at the shop. In his early months there was an incident with a swarm of bees. They descended into the room where the boy would be sleeping and then make an exit from an open window or an open door. My deeply traditional neighbours suggested that some cleansing should be done by brewing beer and slaughtering an ox or a goat. I was not familiar with these cultural practises let alone brewing traditional beer.

The thought however of my child being stung by a thousand bees paralysed me with fear. Then one day the baby was sleeping in his crib, the nanny was outside doing laundry. She saw the swarm of bees, but it was too late to rush inside to close the windows and doors. Then the strangest thing happened the bees fell and died around the crib. I personally saw the few that had been missed by the broom later when I came home. Believing this to be the last straw, I sent for my father-in-law hoping he would intervene. He went into the house without me, the nanny said he sat down with the baby on his lap and said a few things that she never heard. And he never disclosed. He returned to the shop, and we chatted about all things under the sun except the bees. Later he returned home, and the bees never came back.

Difficult conversations were not shied away from either. Instead, we grabbed the bull by the horns and shared the difficulties we met along

life's way. One such conversation was about him retiring completely from the shop. A woman from his village came to report that the old man was becoming more and more forgetful and was giving customers wrong change, mostly extra change. He also muddled up his deliveries and some people were taking advantage of his failing memory. The conversation about moving to town came up. He resisted initially but eventually agreed to come up to live with us.

"Tata you actually qualify for the old age grant, surely we should visit the office and enrol you."

"*Mfazi*, I was raised by men who fed their families by farming and trading, not by depending on government handouts. My father would be ashamed of me."

And that was that. End of that conversation.

For three years we worked together in a wholesale at Elliotdale. It was his last post. I was the captain of that ship in those choppy seas. With all his encouragement and showing up, we could not break even. I failed dismally. Of course, we threw pity parties for ourselves. We often ended up discussing the olden days when Christmas day trading was like a great day at the casino. Just the sight of those donkeys drinking in the pond in front of the shop and customers sitting unassumingly under the trees, he would know it was going to be a super day in the market. Those conversations made us close shop with less heaviness of the heart and hope that the customers would return in their numbers the following day.

He had the ability to dive in and converse about the very things that hurt him the most in his life. It could be the dreadful battles he and his family fought in the quest for the freedom. Or how his family home was reduced to ashes by the then South African Security Forces. The torture by police while in prison never came through in his stories. Instead, he talked about his fellow inmates and made it sound like he had gone on a much-prolonged camping trip.

Even in my young unilluminated life, he allowed me too to dig deep and tell of my own battles with life no matter how frivolous. Within three years of my marriage my mother passed on. The wound was deep, I was torn between my two homes, physically and sometimes financially. There were days we stood behind that counter, my father-in-law and I, in perfect silence and let our thoughts converse. I grew up fast and made big decisions and he helped wherever he could and continually sounded his support.

“Your family must never suffer as long as you are alive.”

For all the pity parties we shared, our best was discussing our sorry state of being the eldest children in our respective families or as they say the ‘deputy parent.’ He was the ‘deputy parent’ to eight siblings whom he saw through their education, weddings and building their own homes. Never complaining for a single day, what fortitude I thought. He did emphasize that him and I were unsung heroes who deserved medals for the roles we played in helping raise our siblings. He would even suggest that we get a hold of some biscuits and a fizzy drink to end our victim session.

When his days were coming to an end, he slept a great deal during our car trips to and from Mthatha for his treatments. His words were fewer, and the laughter replaced by a smile. He was just a passenger. I already missed his voice warning of sharp curves ahead, even when he was right there next to me.

“*Mfazi*, beware of that naughty wind over the train bridges, it can lift a car right off the road.”

“What a gentleman, *inene*,” was a compliment for all the truck drivers who kindly gave us the right of way on the busy national road between Dutywa and Mthatha.

His dear wife had already entered eternal rest and soon he removed his hat from his head and saluted his new path. Our conversations continue even now, though it is in that perfect silence that prevails when one speaks to a memory.

Emigration

By Augustina Khosa

Far in the ruins, we both stood and gazed at the dying beam obliterated by long prevailing shadows of twilight. Traces of red stratus posed in fragmented figures that mock bleeding skies of winter. The purple dusk yields at the distant horizon, hence birds flock into the night.

We were far from home and far from radiant. My elder sister Tinyiko and I were devised on a journey to South Africa where my father worked and lived. Mother left us in the care of our own two days earlier; she had tiny Irene on her back. The news of my maternal grandmother's capture by the Renamo rebels were bitter to our ears, so weary was my mother upon her departure to Magudu.

Mother informed us to take a stroll into the ruins, should she not be back by sunset on the day that follows. Old man Mbiza would come to lead us on a safe route to Magudu. He was informed to find us in the ruins shortly before sunset. She warned us not to take anything along; especially items that people would be suspicious of. Indeed, the second day withered without her presence. On the third day we did as we were told.

I did not like the idea of leaving my long-time companion Shama. Somehow the old dog sensed this awful day in his nerves, he was quite sad and restless throughout the day. After a busy day he usually cools off under the paw-paw tree beside the lane that leads to the old Mohamad shops. On this day he was vigilant around the yard, his eyes on our every move. I watched the hens scour the ground and maul grass in a jolly mood till evening fall.

Shama tried to follow us on our departure, but Tinyiko tanned his hide with a broken stick and uttered uncordial words. The poor dog wailed repeatedly as he ran towards the doorway of our cluster camp, his tail tucked between his hind legs. He sat on the black and white goat hide used as doorway mat. He prostrated his chin on the ground while his

eyes repeatedly winked a sad goodbye. I still shed the tears he shed when he sees me no more. I think he forgave us wherever death hunted him in good faith.

The old man Mbiza was a bit late, but he did as things were planned. "You follow me, make no sound," said Mbiza with grizzled hair paved to baldness by age.

On bare feet, we crouched behind the tail of the old man. We avoided being seen by people and soldiers because it was a crime to leave town without prior approval by the town's commissioner. Mbiza had a better understanding on how to avoid such misconducts, moreover he knew how to avoid landmine areas and rebels' camps. We took a desolated route by the river. We came to the open dell where our cattle grazed in hazy days. There was an Ox wagon waiting for us. It was already dark, and we left to Magudu.

Magudu is a town about ninety-six kilometres west of the capital city Maputo. Ours is Shivunguene, a small town under the wings of Magudu, but far more outskirts from the capital. Both towns Magudu and Shivunguene separate by thirteen kilometres of evergreen vegetation that forms slopes of the Nkomati and Wunintsi River.

My mind rolled back home. Long before the war, our old home had four slime-moulded dome houses with a thatched roof. The fifth one was a brick house next to the syringa trees. We had cheerful livestock and dense farm around the yard. There were natural water pools where we used to cool off during lazy days of summer if not catching toads and fish during rainy days. All these came to pass in verge of war.

Tinyiko has a pale light complexion, brown hair that I always find it similar to the texture of a corn silk. She was a modest kind of a person who could not harm a fly. We grew closer ever since we lost our younger brother Carlito in March of 1981. Unlike my sister; I was dark with a timid smile that hid my three tainted milk canines and two front teeth. As a result, Carlito and I spent a lot of time stealing sugar from the old white bucket behind the bed. Carlito was a jolly fellow, dark with an

ill-favoured face but ever smiling. His look earned him the name of Mabihana, meaning the unattractive one. He had an innateness of an ambient mood. He danced to every beat he would hear on the radio, perfectly he would outsmart his performance to the beat of Banda Six and Devera Ngwena Jazz Band, but I was not a good dancer at all.

We both shared two blue enamel teacups our father bought from South Africa. His cup was a bit smaller than mine, but we both loved the genuinely blue one. Before teatime we would toss a coin to determine winner of the day, the winner would use the cup. Those were blissful days I spent with my brother Carlito before the war, and before his demise. His tiny grave lay beside my paternal grandmother's grave, where they both faced the eastern skies of Shivunguene.

Everything was normal until one morning autumn of 1984. Our town was brim-full of camouflaged soldiers and heavy armour tanks. My peers and I went to meet them; they carried heavy arms that come in different sizes.

"That is a bazooka, and that is Akaimé, AK-47, they will kill the rebels who came to kill our people," said Matewu.

Matewu was the eldest lad in our companionship; he had smelly armpits and untied curly hair that was seldom washed or combed. His age was almost similar to that of my sister. In this parade he played a predecessor who knew all types of arms carried by soldiers. Five of us strolled towards the military camp. The heart of the town was the only road that catered shops founded parallel to each other. The Entrance was a small bridge that sheltered crocodiles of Nyamungwe River. The tilted road exits town in less than a kilometre towards the slopes of Wunintsi. We greeted soldiers who were in the company of legal age ladies in town. Soldiers laughed friendly with the people around. As we were about to pass the last building of the town's exit, I noticed a bud wire stretched towards the thick. There was a military tank that faces luxuriant fig trees, a home to hundreds of monkeys close to the river. A loud voice gave us a fright.

“People like you don’t go beyond this wire, only soldiers,” said a dark short, camouflaged soldier puffing a cigarette. He had long rifle with a sharp bayonet hunched face up, a cross belt of ammunition rolled around his body. Like other soldiers, this fellow was friendly too. He gave us a can of sardine and blue label Marie biscuits that we referred to as blucher. We ate while he interrogated us about our town.

“Have you seen any Masangaises, the one with filth hair and dirty scouts’ green uniform?” his question had conviction on his face.

No one ever met those fellows in our companion, but we heard terrible scary things they do to people before they killed them.

The first attack of our town came in the same winter, many people lost their lives and mass graves were filled. Trenches in the line of defence were dug around the town. The same war that swept thousands of lives from Rovuma to Maputo, was the same war our father thought otherwise about our safety and future. The war was a vengeance against innocent civilians whose sins were to witness the demise of the tyranny of the Portuguese colony, in the nine years that came to pass.

In masses we were cruelly removed from our rural homes to concentrated camps. We left behind blissful houses, livestock, and cultivated lands. My heart remained stricken each time I heard awful deeds by the rebels. As young lads we collected many cartridges and made necklace out of them, but our elders did not approve. Life seemed good back there though times were hard.

Mbiza lead us on a safe journey to reunite with our mother and Irene. My maternal family were still stricken by grandmother’s ordeal, but there was sign of hope that she is still alive. We overstayed the whole winter in Magudu because war was rife in Xinavana and Palmeira. Those two towns formed a puzzle to route our destination. When spring rains begin to fall, more soldiers were deployed, and trucks were able to cross war-stricken towns. We left the town early midday inside a blue Mitsubishi canter. My sister and I sat at the back while mother and tiny Irene joined the driver in the front.

Upon sunset we arrived in Palmeira, the atmosphere was not good at all. The gravel street turned muddy from pouring rains of spring. Soldiers were all over the place, so were armoured trucks and tanks. Our truck was ordered to stop by a short soldier who held a big bazooka. He talked to the driver while his eyes roamed all over. Numerous militants climbed to join us at the back. They greeted us as the truck took off on the muddy road. Few metres uphill, deafening sound of the tank spit out, trees were shaken. Our truck came to halt again. I could hear villagers of Palmeira scream from a distance. Our company quickly jumped off the truck till no one was left except us. The truck driver forced his way up hill. More villagers loomed out of nowhere heading in our direction. Some climbed on the truck without the driver's permission. Looking from our trails, the road was full of exodus heading our direction. The tussle of a gun fight filled my ears like huge rain drops on a corrugated dusty roof. Each time the bazooka or mortar spit, people crouched down deeper.

"Nós queremos jogar vamos!" screamed one of the soldiers beside the truck, he said to his fellow soldiers in Portuguese 'let's go and play this game'.

He was referring to playing the game of guns with the rebels. He urged us to disappear because he wants to play. Gun shots faded as we drifted away, but I could see blizzards and flame from a distance. Our company jumped off on safer grounds, some thanked the driver.

It was dark when we passed the capital towards Matola and Moamba. The rain has stopped in these parts of the country, though skies were dark and roaring. We were lucky, no enemies or soldiers ambushed our journey. My sister felt asleep on my shoulder. Shortly before midnight we received a warm welcome from Aunt Rosa near the border in Komatipoort. She was awake and waited for us.

"Children of my brother, you must be tired, it was a long way indeed," she said excitedly.

We moved into the kitchen of the house, it looked modern with bright lights. We sat in the dining area; it was bright and clear unlike where we

came from. There was a teapot and teacups on top of the table and my aunt instructed my sister to pour tea for all of us. Irene was asleep on the lap of my mother. We drank tea, and ate bread smeared with red Hugo's jam. I took a short break on the veranda outside.

I sensed most people were asleep in the distant house. I could see faint lights that sought to be downslope from where I stood. My sister joined me.

"Soon our papers will be stamped and will drive pass those lights," she said facing a series of streetlights that go past the border downslope.

In no time, I watched the night as the truck drift away from Komatipoort, away from the big guns. We were surrounded by neon lights that meant a new world to us. I felt a sense of guilt for having left my friends without saying goodbye, yet I felt safe and passed out on my sister's shoulder.

I woke up in the bedroom of my father's house. It was eight o'clock in the morning. The bedroom was dull and made of concrete walls. Cold was the red polished floor as I climbed off the three-quarter bed. On bare feet, I took a stroll towards the window. I heard voices outside, and I could see young boys playing soccer in the street. There was much laughter within this house. I overheard women's voices and I recognised my mother's voice. As I walked towards the kitchen, I noticed the old coal stove was warm and surrounded. My mother and sister were in the company of N'wa Ndlayeni.

"He must have forgotten us back here; he was way too young when he last came," said N'wa Ndlayeni.

She was my mother's friend. I saw her slim face in the photo we left in Shivunguene. She welcomed me on her lap as my sister prepared a cup of tea. I was shy and wanted a way outside. She asked my mother about Carlito's demise. Finally, I managed to break away from her arms as she paid attention to the sad story. I stood at the gate sensing a new whiff of the township. Two boys of my age came to join me, they were friendly and inquisitive

"I am Dan, and he is Jonas, what's your name?" Dan asked me. Dan and Jonas wore bright smiles.

"Show us how you play soccer," said Jonas, the lad with the big head.

"Tell us about where you come from," said Dan.

Dan was keen to know everything about me. He gave me no chance to voice something out. That was my new home, radiant of glory with new friends. I nod to their invitation; the streets were blissful and peaceful. Very far from the guns of war.

I'll Miss You

By Safiyya Jogee

Jamie hated being there.

Everywhere she looked, she was reminded of the man she loved and the house they had built together. Atop the mantelpiece lay pictures of the two of them smiling, forever frozen in the frame of glass. Ransom's chair still sat positioned facing the garden where he would paint the birds as they warmed their colourful feathers in the late afternoon sun. His coffee mug sat in the sink, the dark coffee stain laying testament to the last time he drank from it. His socks still lay strewn on the bathroom floor from the habitual way he would throw it in the general direction of the laundry basket after a long and exhausting day at work.

"It will get easier," Mama Sarah, her mother-in-law, murmured.

"I just miss the old bastard so much," she whispered as her throat clogged with pain and her eyes began to swell with unshed tears.

"I know sweetheart. I know," She patted Jamie's hands affectionately and turned to the guests who milled about the house, eating finger foods, and making conversation with the other guests.

"He would hate it," Mama Sarah smiled as she looked around, "if he saw all these people who came to see him go."

"I know, he would say Darling, the day I die, turn me into one of those fancy and expensive Christmas ornaments and throw a huge party in my honour," Jamie echoed her late husband's constant ramblings.

"That man sure did like to have a good time," Mama Sarah sighed.
"It will get easier," Jamie parroted her earlier words and smiled warmly when Mama Sarah's lips turned into a soft small smile.

“He was lucky to have a woman like you. I’m grateful for you being in his life.”

“Oh, Mama Sarah you’re going to make me cry and I think I have just about drained the well dry today,” she fanned her eyes. “Go, eat some food while I make sure that Aunt Joyce doesn’t make off with my golden spoons again.”

“You sure you’ll be, okay?” she asked and searched Jamie’s bright green eyes.

“I’m sure,” she replied.

Jamie watched her walk off before she made her way to the table decorated with pictures of Ransom displaying the life he lived, the places he had been to and the achievements he had won.

“I’ll miss you.”

“What is this about officer?” Jamie led the two police officers into her home.

Officer George and Harold followed her into the lounge and sat down on the plush leather seats. Jamie followed suit and sat opposite them, the comfort of the sofa lost on her as she sat tensely on the edge, poised forward as if she already knew the two men came bearing bad news.

“Mrs Roberts, we are truly sorry for what happened to your husband,” Officer George opened with and looked at his partner.

Jamie froze in her seat before she released a deep breath, “Thank you, Officer. Again, what is this about?”

“I don’t mean to re-open old wounds, but our research team has not been able to locate the body. We’ve had multiple search parties

landscaping the piece of the forest where we found his severed leg, but our canines haven't been able to locate any other leads or recover the rest of his body," Officer George supplied tensely as he watched the grieving widow.

"Oh, sweet Jesus," Jamie let loose the sob she was holding in, and her chest constricted painfully as her tears slipped down her wrinkled face. "We are truly sorry," Officer George handed her a tissue from the box on the coffee table, "but as of right now the department has ceased the search party. In almost two months there have been no other leads and we have other investigations to see into."

"So, his body is never going to be recovered?" she asked, the tremble in her voice echoing in the silent house.

"Of course, it will," Officer Harold rushed to answer, "it's been raining nonstop for the last two months, and he has been missing for over three. It was sheer luck we were able to find his limb when we did because it looks like the rain and mud has washed a lot of evidence away."

"What Officer Harold means," Officer George cut in with a stern look in his partner's direction, "is that it would be a wasted effort to search for him or for any other clues as to who kidnapped and killed him in this weather. If we are not careful the rain, mud, and our blind searching may wash away any clues we might be able to find. But rest assured we will find him; it is simply a matter of time."

"So, his case is still open?" Jamie sniffed as she wiped away the last of her tears.

"Of course, Ma'am. I felt the need to inform you of this development in his case because it wounds me to see such a travesty occur. I mean what kind of monster kidnaps an elderly gentleman of sixty four? You're in such pain and I promise to do whatever it takes to bring him back to you for a proper burial," Officer George growled as he avoided Jamie's eyes, instead he glared harshly at the wall as he told her his piece.

“So, is there any way he might still be alive?” Jamie questioned. She chose not to look both officers in the eye and instead looked down at her wrinkled fingers and began to tear at the tissue soaked with her tears.

“I’m afraid from the evidence we have managed to recover, it is highly unlikely,” Officer Harold remarked softly.

Jamie shuddered and swallowed multiple times before she gained the courage to look at the police officers.

“I deeply appreciate you coming to inform me. Ransom lived a fulfilling and joyful life, and it pains me not to bury him in the way he would have liked,” she said softly as she smiled at them, and they nodded in turn. “We better be heading back to the station. If anything else arises in the case, we will make sure to keep you updated,” Officer George stood and shook her hand strongly.

“You take care, Mrs Roberts, and if there is anything you need, or any threat is made to you please do call for either Officer George or me,” Officer Harold said as he followed Officer George to the door.

“Thank you so much, young man. I really appreciate you coming out to see an old hag like me,” Jamie waved goodbye to the two men and watched from the porch as they got into their vehicle and drove away. She watched their taillights disappear from view before she made her way back into the house. She had work to do.

“Help,” a course male voice echoed up the stairs as Jamie made her way into the basement.

She switched the light on and pulled the door closed behind her. She made sure to hear the lock click into place before she made her way down the flight of stairs.

“You monster! Let me out of here,” he croaked, his lips chipped and cracked. The skin was peeling, and odd pieces had specks of blood on them.

Now, Ransom is that any way to talk to your loving wife?” Jamie mocked as she took in the state of the man before she picked up the cricket bat that leaned against the back wall.

He sat shackled to the thick steel drainpipe in the corner of the room. His left leg was brutally cut off at the knee and the pants leg was soaked in dark red blood. The bandages which covered the wound had long since soaked up the blood and hid the jagged knife wounds where she had severed his limb. His right leg was covered in black- and plum-coloured bruises from when he tried to pull himself loose from the chains. His fingernails were broken and coated in blood, his hair a wild mess and his body covered in filth. However, it was his eyes that told the most pain; where they were once bright, blue, and full of life, now they were haunted and in pain from all that he had seen and experienced.

“Wife? What kind of wife would do this to her husband?” he sneered before wincing in pain.

“A fed up one. Do you know what’s funny, Ransom?” she questioned sweetly but was met with silence.

“I asked you, do you know what’s funny, Ransom?” she snarled and slammed the cracked cricket bat against the side of his head.

“What?” he whimpered and crawled away from her.

“The police were here earlier on. They said only a monster could do something like this. Do you think I am a monster, Ransom? Now, I’d be very careful about what I say next because those officers pissed me off and there is a lovely pot of sugar caramelising on the stove,” she warned him in her thick southern accent as she cocked her head to the side and gazed at him.

"No, Jamie, you're not a monster," he whispered and gently shook his head.

"That's what I thought you would say. You see, four months ago I was a loving wife. I stayed home like a good little bitch, cooked delicious meals, baked every week, cleaned the house until you could eat off the floor, and I loved my husband. Did you love me, Ransom?" she asked as she rhythmically tapped the cricket bat against the floor.

"No," Ransom sobbed and curled in on himself.

"That's right, you didn't. Because while I was at home sweating like a dog to make sure you came home to a good meal, you were out there screwing those whores. What kind of loving husband were you?"

"The worst, Jamie please, it was a mistake," he pleaded.

"Well, once was mistake, but over forty years of marriage? That ain't a mistake, love. That's a fucking problem. And I am so goddamn tired of your excuses of it was a mistake, it didn't mean anything, and I don't love those whores! So, I'm taking matters into my own hands and I'm doing what I want," she smiled sickly and kneeled before him.

"No, please, don't do this," he shook his head furiously and began to back even further away from her.

"Ransom, my cheating, unfaithful, abusive, wife-hating, lying bastard of a husband, you are not going anywhere. I'm going to keep on hurting you until you feel every ounce of pain you have caused me every single time you cheated and beat me. And there were a lot of times, I have forty years to make up for," she gripped his face painfully and kissed him. "Jamie..." he begged, his eyes filled with tears.

"Now you be good for me darling," she said sweetly as she got up and made her way to the foot of the stairs, "I'll be back soon and remember, I'll miss you."

She winked.

An Old Bond

By Caitlin Hancocks

A hardwood bookcase against Astrid's lounge wall tempted Eric from the doorway as he waited for her to return from the kitchen. Six proud shelves displayed literary works from a variety of fiction and non-fiction categories. *A Brief History of Time*. *The Time Machine*. *Never Let Me Go*. *The Star Rover*. Her collection was impressive, and reminiscent of his own. He was unsurprised. They had met in a library, searching for the same book on retrocognition. She had insisted he loan it first, but over a cup of coffee they decided to split the two-week check-out period.

"There's another cabinet in my bedroom," Astrid broke his concentrated silence as she entered behind him with two glasses.

He followed as she led him to a room illuminated by shades of red and orange gleaming from a salt rock lamp on the bedside table. As Astrid perched on the end of the bed frame, Eric stepped closer to inspect the second volume of her library. This collection was smaller, containing several titles with which he was unfamiliar.

"Why separate them?"

"They watch over me while I sleep."

His fine brows furrowed slightly over his eyes as he turned to look at her.

"And take me places in my dreams," she added.

The prospect of adventures with Astrid in their dreams brought the urge to embrace her. He kissed her, and she transported him.

The newly acquainted pair spent silent hours under the gaze of the books, learning the layout of each other's bodies. Weeks of careful gestures and shy caresses had generated anticipation for this moment where

they could explore the feelings that were so close to divinity. Midnight had passed when they stilled, and their breaths normalised once more. Delicate drops of perspiration decorated Eric's torso, highlighted by the autumn colours of the lamp.

Eric lifted himself and reached over Astrid for his drink which he had placed on the nightstand. His drowsy gaze was caught by a hidden title lying beneath a notebook next to the glass. It held his pensive eyes for several seconds, prompting a connection into some subconscious memory almost entirely unknown to him. He could not place the last time he had read it, and knew he did not own it, but the story's motif arose immediately within him.

"Adella," the name slid out of his mouth as he picked the book up.

Sitting up, Astrid slipped strong fingers around his wrist and tugged for his attention.

"How do you know that name?"

Eric heard nothing but a flurry of thoughts that struggled to materialise clearly. Opening the cover of the book to the title page and peering inside, he was met with a short, hand-written note. You and I are one, Reiner. He read it again, mouthing the words in search of understanding. "How do you know Adella?" Astrid ripped the book out of his hands and forced him to hear her.

Kneeling against the steel bed frame, Adella steadied herself next to where Reiner lay. He barely stirred; his figure camouflaged under the blanket. Adella counted his breaths as they came and went in increasingly longer intervals. The sun that shone through the windowless frame above his head was powerless at curing the cold in his core that made him shiver. What was once a fit young man had shrunk to a boy-shaped wafer. Rosy skin had faded to a pasty complexion that teased grey. Next to Adella's plumpness, the extent of his illness had nowhere to hide.

There was little she could do to help him, so Adella slid under the covers beside Reiner and wrapped him in her soft arms and legs. She willed her body to transfer its abundance of heat to the one with whom she had shared a womb.

“No,” he protested, “you too will fall ill.”

“As long as you suffer, I am not well.”

Reiner tried feebly to push her away, only for her to tighten her hold as much as his bones would allow. Their thoughts were loud with unspeakable truths – the shared knowing that he was not likely to survive this bout of influenza.

“I hate to leave you, Adella.”

“Then take me with you. How can I be whole on my own?”

The idea of Adella’s impending loneliness brought a jagged lump into Reiner’s throat. There was not much left to say. Only the words ingrained in their souls could afford him more life in the few days he sensed he had left. Only the words that had put them to sleep at night could comfort his sister.

“Read to me,” he requested, motioning to a chair at the end of the bed, upon which sat a black-jacketed book. Adella flipped to a page near the middle. A dog-ear marked a well-read passage in their copy of *Wuthering Heights*.

“Be with me always, take any form, drive me mad. Only do not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you.”

“Are we inside one of my dreams?” she ran her forefinger over his dry lips, inspecting his face which seemed all at once so familiar. She searched his sharp features for the history that had brought them together but

could not find it.

Recognition was slow to come over Eric. Astrid observed him as he approached the forthcoming memories which were returning in fragments. One face appeared in his mind, then another. They were the same face essentially: male and female versions of one person. Recollections carefully filtered into his thoughts; recollections of shared homes and hiding places, games, and stories. Then came the vague understanding that he and Astrid were not at all new acquaintances. Instead, they were lifelong partners who had once shared every moment together.

As the blood drained from his face, Eric struggled to stay conscious.

“I had forgotten everything,” he admitted, “in this life, I forgot entirely.”

A burning feeling threatened tears, two of which escaped down Astrid’s flaming cheeks. She had not forgotten. She had remembered it all and had never stopped calling to him.

“It’s okay, Eric. We can figure it out.”

This love that existed between them was not new. It was born the moment Adella and Reiner were. It had simply mutated, now blended with romance and desire that was foreign before. Perhaps that was why every interaction had felt so overwhelming; there were spontaneous elements that made an old bond swell to capacity. The love had become dense and heavy. Eric immediately saw Astrid’s conviction that the physical past need not influence the metaphysical present in which they found themselves.

“You’re doubting us,” she registered.

There was no rational weapon he could use to come out victorious against this battle. Astrid stood on the other side of the moral arena. Once an ally, she was now his opponent. Surely Adella and Reiner’s young souls could not truly have predicted the reunion which lay centuries in their

future, but something within them knew. They were bound beyond the natural realm; by a force that twisted space and time to accommodate their destiny.

“It’s not right. You see that, don’t you?”

“Eric, it’s not what you’re thinking.”

Eric ran his hands over his face and through his hair, unable to formulate a response that would appease Astrid.

“You don’t believe me? There is no sin between us. We have done no wrong.”

Eric’s instincts were a magnetic force from outside the apartment, pulling him away from her, beckoning him to leave.

“If I stay, where will the longing and desire go? After what we have shared how can this be wholesome again?” the words were reluctant to form in his mouth, but he had to let them out.

“Even if you only live once, do you really want to take that chance?” Astrid slid to the parquet floor as Eric redressed and lingered by the door.

“If this is the only life we have, I believe we will find each other again. If not, you should forget this love in all your futures.”

“I will never forget. You are the reason I always choose rebirth. The nature of the love does not make it any less valuable.”

Astrid waited for a response, but Eric could not truthfully say what she needed to hear to accept his decision. He leaned down to place a kiss on her head before turning to leave her where she sat. She could not stand, could not move her legs, as much as her mind begged her to chase him. He had asked where the longing and desire would go, but more important to her was where the love would go. In the atmosphere she sensed that he had left it all there for her to either absorb or

dispose of. She wanted to run too, abandoning the fading dreams, but they clung to her like the stench of sweat on a shirt worn too many summers.

As she heard the door shut behind him, Astrid pulled herself back onto the bed. Her hands navigated their way to that page in the book where she had safely tucked the proof of their briefly shared life. Tearing it from the book and ripping it to illegible pieces, she disassembled the purpose that had kept her together until that moment.

Into the Portal

By Robyn De Lange

Parisa walked up the driveway. It had been years since she last saw the old house. Nostalgic memories surfaced as she made her way to the front door. Her parents weren't home. They hardly ever were now that she was in university and living in a commune. Shaking the thoughts out her head, she unlocked the door. A few moments alone was something she really needed.

Once settled and a cup of coffee in hand, she went out into the garden. She smiled to herself as she sat on the old cement bench remembering how she used to play with her imaginary friends, running around the mushroom circles in the grass. Taking a long slow sip of her coffee, she listened to the birds. It seemed as if all life stood still in that garden. The grass was wild, the roses bloomed and there were random spots of red from the false strawberries that popped up every summer.

The smell of mint drifted through the garden. Parisa inhaled deeply while rubbing her temples. She tried to blink the dizziness and blurry vision away, then suddenly she was well again and watching a little girl play with tiny glowing orbs in front of her. She tried to speak but choked on her words. She sat confused for a while watching the scene that seemed familiar yet foreign. Almost like a memory she couldn't quite grasp. She quietly watched her younger self singing in a language she didn't know. The orbs repeated the melody while a faint harmony drifted on the breeze around them.

Parisa sat mesmerised by what she saw. She had been convinced those orbs were imaginary. As she watched, a rustling sound came from the shrubbery followed by an unearthly snarl that silenced the birds and the music. She looked around and caught a glimpse of a creature between the trees. The shrubs started to shimmer and ripple as a strange beast stepped through. It was covered in coarse black fur, almost resembling a wolf. Its body was powerful, and it radiated dark energy. Its eyes were

an unnamed colour that was only found on a spectrum seen under an ultraviolet light. It slowly stalked forward towards little Parisa, sniffing the air before glaring at her and the orbs.

Little Parisa looked at the creature curiously. She held none of the fear she should have. To her another fairy was a welcomed playmate. The orbs spun and buzzed at an annoyingly high pitch. Parisa covered her ears to make it bearable. Some of the orbs stayed in front of little Parisa trying to protect her. A couple more were trying to nudge her backwards towards the house, while one darted off. The creature watched the orbs carefully. It was studying them, waiting for an opening.

A few seconds passed and the creature made no further move. Little Parisa started singing the strange melody again and the creature snapped into action. It lunged forward, attacking her, and cleanly missing every orb. She screamed as the creature knocked her to the ground, its teeth sinking into her leg. She hit the creature's face with her tiny fists, but the thing wouldn't let go.

It slowly dragged her towards the portal, sending the orbs into greater disarray. Bouncing and screeching at the creature, they yanked out fur, successfully getting another snarl out of it. Little Parisa put up a fight, kicking with her free leg and grabbing at the grass while screaming at the top of her lungs. Her skin started glowing, and heat radiated through the creature's mouth forcing it to let go. It dropped her, shaking its head trying to get the sensation out of its mouth. Little Parisa scrambled backwards as the glow subsided and the creature lunged towards her again.

Parisa watched on in horror as she subconsciously ran her hand over her upper thigh across the scar she had always known as dog bite. A few seconds later her parents came running into the garden following an orb.

The creature was thrown back from the little girl as it attacked, with barely a flick of her father's wrist. Her mother scooped her now unconscious body up and ran inside. Her father waved his hand in a complex pattern

and the creature froze mid movement. Parisa didn't stay to see what her father did with the animal, she ran into the house after her mother. She found her in the kitchen with little Parisa laid on the table. Her mother cut the mangled pants leg off and cleaned out the wound with inhuman speed.

"It's deep, no amount of magic would be able to heal a voracio bite on this side of the portal." She spoke to no one in particular. When Parisa's father came in she told him so.

"There's no other option, we have to go now!"

He gently picked little Parisa up and they bolted back to the garden. Parisa thought they were going to the hospital. Vague memories of waking up in a room with people in white coats surfaced as she followed her parents out. She was surprised when they went to the same place the creature, the voracio, first appeared.

The space started to ripple and shimmer again, this time Parisa heard a different sound, it was a melody similar to the one her younger self had sung. The three went through the shimmer and disappeared. Parisa stood for a moment contemplating whether she should follow or not and noticed the shimmer starting to fade. She took a breath and ran through before it disappeared, not knowing if she'd be able to get back again.

As she came out on the other side she looked around. It was almost the same as her garden, except for the pathways. She caught a glimpse of her parents disappearing around a bend and ran after them. Once she caught up, she began to notice her surroundings. The colours were striking and there were so many different hues she was sure didn't exist in her world.

The scents from the flowers were intoxicating. She never thought so many different smells would work this well together. It wasn't an assault on the nose, more like a gentle caress, enticing you to come closer. She kept patting her cheeks to bring her back into the moment. She ran

with her parents towards what looked like a mansion. Every detail of the place screamed plants, the stairways looked like spiralled vines and the walls were covered in all kinds of flower buds.

As they dashed up the stairs, she noticed the people rushing around her. Their clothing stood out with designs looking like they were inspired by different types of plants. Ones that looked like doctors' scrubs and coats had the impression of camomile and echinacea flowers. She realised they were actually in some form of hospital.

Her parents walked into a room, and she slipped in as they closed the door. Parisa watched her father lay her tiny body on the bed while a doctor prepped what looked like some form of medicinal paste. She recognised him from the day the dog attacked her. Only now she knew it wasn't a dog.

He examined little Parisa's leg and waved his hand in the air above the wound in a string of patterns almost like the one she saw her father use. The doctor then applied the paste to the wound. Little Parisa's body jerked, and her skin started to glow.

The doctor looked stunned, "What the hell? The paste and bite shouldn't react like that!"

Parisa's father looked to her mother with a worried expression. She sighed, "She isn't completely human, she has fae sight."

Parisa looked between her parents for a hint that this was a joke. Everyone was deathly serious, and she plopped down on a vacant chair to take it all in. Fairy sight, the ability to see past the glimmer and into other realms. She knew it from the fairy tales her mother used to read to her. She was so lost in that piece of information that she wasn't concentrating on the rest of the conversation until she saw the doctor nod his head.

He assured her parents that this would be handled with the utmost secrecy. If this got out before she came of age, it would put her in grave

danger. When the glow faded, he wrapped a bandage around the wound while thanking the earth mother it worked.

Parisa blinked then cursed under her breath because she missed the whole conversation. She looked at her small body on the bed. Little Parisa's eyes fluttered open. The doctor smiled at her and asked how she was feeling. As little Parisa sat up, Parisa was pulled out the door and the hospital, all the way back through the portal.

She was thrown out of the memory with such force it took a while to catch her breath. She came back to her senses with the realization that she was still seated on the bench in the garden. The sun was already setting, she straightened her legs out, kicking her cup of now cold coffee over. She stretched before standing. Everything still looked the same. Parisa shook her head laughing. That was one crazy dream. She stared at the shrubbery where the portal had been for a full minute, almost daring something to happen. When it remained the same, she picked up her cup, satisfied. The stress of her studies must be getting to her. As she walked into the house, she didn't see the little orbs rise from the grass around the bench and dance after her in a happy display of colours.

Little helpers

By Gelise van de Vorst

She sits in bed, watching the sunset through lacy curtains. It casts images like shadow animals over her white bed sheets. She lines up her “little helpers” on the nightstand that gleams in the tea-coloured light of her bedroom and smells of lavender furniture polish. The pills lay in three little groups, the first group consisting of two purple pills, small and oval. Next to it lies another two, round and white. These are on prescription from the GP right down the road from where she works: Dr “Candy-man” Boysen. The third group consists of a single little pill, round and yellow as the sun. This one she had to beg, borrow, and steal for. It came from the young woman who took over the practice of her childhood doctor, the one who her parents used to go to, before their move to the retirement village: Dr “Stingy” Saira.

The yellow ones were hard to get, and she doesn't have a repeat prescription. She picks up each little pill, one by one, and drinks it down with tiny sips of lukewarm water from the glass she keeps ready next to her bed. She savours the bitterness that catches in the back of her throat as she swallows each pill. She does not try to wash it away but instead carries it like a penance. The effects start almost instantly and she struggles to wrestle her disoriented limbs in under the covers. Tomorrow is Sunday so her alarm is off. It is also the reason she indulged in an extra little purple one. She hopes to sleep until noon, at least. The fewer hours until the next sunset the better. She shuts her eyes as she feels herself shifting and dispersing, breaking up into molecules and being drawn down. She is emptying out, one particle at a time, trickling as sand through the narrow waist of an hourglass, to the other place. The other place always starts off black; an inky darkness that is almost viscous, she lays in it.

Her senses wake up first, a chain reaction of life. This night she hears the sound of the carnival first as it tunnels its way towards her, growing louder and more obnoxious. The sound is an entity of its own. It consists

of music that crackles its way through old speakers, the shrill bells of a game being won, the low hum of machinery and the sounds of bodies talking and laughing. The laughter is thick and gummy and seems to cling to every other sound. Next, she feels the damp coldness and the itch of the grass she is lying on. It is a contradiction to the sticky-hot night air, smelling of popcorn, cotton candy, cigarettes, and petrol. She slowly opens her eyes, letting them adjust to the colourful glow emanating from the commotion mere metres from her; the primary-coloured lights of the rides and games punctuating the illumination created by the many strings of golden bulbs. It casts a web over everything teeming below, containing the madness, making it seem less intimidating. Only taste eludes her. Her mouth feels tight and rough.

She gets up, revelling in the speed at which she can perform this mundane task. She dusts off her dress and smooths the front down with hands no longer arthritic and spotted with age. Her body feels supple. When she is here she feels a comfort in herself that feels so far away when she is back in her life. She walks off into the symphony of noise, a little faster than she would naturally; she knows she is running against time. She searches for him through a sea of faces, so identical in their differences that they are of no consequence – human white noise.

Tonight, he waits by the carousel, the rococo contraption lazily spinning behind him. He is tall and darkly handsome, like someone from a Spanish movie she watched as a child. She can't remember what the movie was about. There were no subtitles, and she certainly had no grasp of Spanish, but that doesn't matter. He holds out his hand, not saying anything, but smiling – more so with his eyes than with his mouth – as he gently leads her to a beige horse. The creature looks terrified, and it unsettles her, with its eyes huge and dead, and its mouth a silent scream around its bit. It is decorated in pastel garlands and its purple saddle is trimmed with gold, and in a strange way she doesn't want to offend it. She lets him help her onto the ride and holds on as it jerks into motion. He stands behind her and the heat radiating from him feels comforting on her damp back. As they twirl slowly, he presses his lips to the shell of her ear. Softly, he sings to her. The song is in Spanish and she doesn't know the words, but she lays her head on him and closes

her eyes. Everything is perfect; this is the life she lives for. After too short a time, she feels the tangibility of him and the horse start to dissipate. The world around her starts growing spongy, the scenery dissolving like a water colour painting left in the rain. Sounds of traffic and vacuum cleaners and car alarms prick through the sounds of the carnival. She doesn't fight. She knows it is pointless. She looks at his unfocused face and silently promises tomorrow.

She wakes up to eyelids that feel glued together, a pounding head and a throat so parched it feels cracked. She reaches for the mostly full glass of water left over from last night and drinks it greedily. It tastes dusty, but she doesn't care. As the water hits her stomach it contracts painfully causing her to double over and throw up on the carpet next to her bed. She reaches for her phone and looks at the time: 9:00AM. Fuck. She tries her best to avoid looking at the date, but she does anyway. August 2nd, she has been feeling it coming in her bones. She is certain that she would know this date even if she was marooned on an island, alone and without a calendar. It was on this day fifteen years ago that they lost their son; a cot death in the early hours of the morning. They had tried and tried for him before he came – a little pink thing with large brown eyes and a head of dark hair. He slept so well, even from the beginning. They named him Che.

Tears stream down her cheeks and drip onto the vomit stain on the carpet. She angrily pulls off her cotton night dress and throws it on the puddle before she violently starts stomping on it, as if trying to kill it. She does this for a long time. Her passions spent and her lower back aching, she takes two little purple tablets and heads to the bathroom. She swallows the pills with water straight out of the tap, brushes her teeth and steps into the shower. Standing in the spray she considers going to her son's grave today, but the thought of running into her ex-husband stings her eyes with a fresh wave of tears. She will go on Friday after work to take flowers and clean up, as she always does. She gets dressed and gets on with her day. She scrubs the vomit stain in the bedroom and then vacuums and washes the already clean floors of her apartment. Afterwards, she dusts the already spotless surfaces and tends to her balcony-garden. It is lunchtime but she has no appetite.

Her phone rings. It's her parents. She ignores the call. She knew they would call and they knew she wouldn't answer, not on this day, but listening to the melody of the ringtone makes her smile nonetheless. It is a gesture on both their parts; an attempt at acknowledgement, a way to say what no one has words for. At four she opens a bottle of wine and starts cutting paper flowers out of brightly coloured cardboard. The library's summer reading competition is starting soon, and this year's décor will be gaudier than ever – a last-ditch attempt to tear the children away from their smartphones. She wonders if she and Che would have had fights about him and his phone, the way she sees other frustrated parents have with their sullen teenagers. She drowns the thought in another glass of wine and waits for sunset.

By six she is ready for bed, carefully and ritualistically setting out the little "helpers". Two purple ones (even though she tries to stick to one per night), the customary two round white ones, and a yellow one. She looks in the bottom of the plastic prescription bottle from Dr. "Suspicious" Saira: only two more left. She doubts Dr. "Snotty" Saira will give her any more. Annoyance tugs at her, but she doesn't follow it. She is too tired and fuzzily warm from the wine to bother. Fuck it, she thinks, as she empties the remaining yellow pills into her hand, adding them to the third pile. She starts swallowing them down, one by one. Her secret sacramental wafers.

She is in the blackness of the other place, alone and numb, before sensation oozes over her. It floods into her ears, mouth, and nose, livening her senses up. By the time she bats open her eyelids, now smooth and un-weathered, she feels the sadness and guilt of the day dissipate. All that is left in her now is excitement, and the promise of endless possibilities – the kind only the young know. She goes looking for him and finds him by the Ferris wheel, the sight of him eliciting a strange swirl of nostalgia and novelty in her. Her stomach flutters as he takes her hand and leads her to a seat on the ride. The seat is a plastic, bucket-like thing for two, that locks you in with a flimsy metal rod. The ride is smooth and leisurely, and stops periodically. She stares out over the other place, transfixed by how it glitters like a jewel in an ocean of nothingness, the darkness seeming hard and waxen. He drapes a long

arm around her shoulders and pulls her toward him, making their little seat sway so far above the ground. Cuddling into his warmth she feels as peaceful and safe as anyone would before they realise how bitter life can be. From up in the air the gaudy carnival music becomes a sort of lullaby and by the time they reach the very top of the Ferris wheel, she is so happy that the thought of existing in any other state becomes an abstract and fanciful notion.

A booming, intrusive beeping sound seeps in all around her and tears large gashes of reality into her contentment. It is her alarm. The force of the soundwaves shakes the seams of her world loose. No, please, not yet. She prays inwardly: she deserves this. She covers her ears and closes her eyes, shaking her head from side to side, trying to shake herself loose from her real life. To her astonishment the noise stops. The carnival commences, like someone hit the play button after a long pause. But it seems tilted, suddenly; off kilter, somehow. The music sounds stretched and slow, like an old VHS tape rewind and played too many times. The lights all seem to flicker, the dimming and brightening of them – seemingly at random – making her anxious. They have been up here for too long. Frantically she looks over the sides of the seat, trying to get someone’s attention.

“Hey,” she yells downward, “bring us down.”

All that answers is a peal of random laughter and animated chatter, except now it is devoid of enjoyment and borders on hysteria. She feels feverish all of a sudden, her skin slick with sweat and her hands cold.

“Do something,” she pleads with him, his mouth still bearing a hint of a smile, but his eyes seeming bewildered.

He leans in close and starts singing in her ear. She pushes him away forcefully, overwhelmed and crushed by the strangeness of it all. She doesn’t realise it, but she starts to scream. The lights become painfully bright and as her pitch increases and without warning, everything grows quiet and dark: A power outage. She sits there swaying in the dark, her throat tasting of blood. Dumbfounded and dismayed, she reaches out

for his hand, but he slumps in the seat next to her, cold and still as a cadaver. She cries and waves and rebels against her situation but nothing helps. She is trapped in this strange world, growing more menacing by the second. At a loss for anything else to do she wriggles her slim young form out from under the metal rod that secures her to the plastic seat. Carefully, balancing precariously, she starts planning her way down the frame of the ride. She doesn't know what she will do once she is down there, but that will have to wait. As she leans over to grab the metal framework, a brilliant light materialises to her left, shatteringly bright, causing a searing in her skull that sends her tumbling forward.

She manages to grab hold of the plastic seat, her palm sweating. She kicks one leg out, trying to grab hold of the metallic frame. Another devastating light appears to her right, like the eyes of Ra himself, winking at her playfully. A hard jolt follows, an earthquake of sorts, that almost flings her from the construction all together. She is crying now, her limbs aching and her mind frantic. Piece by piece small parts of her world start springing to life again – not completely, it was a dim sort of half-life – as if someone was flipping switches on a broken fuse box. It is grotesque. The cotton candy stand comes on first, flinging spun sugar into the air and making everything smell sickly sweet. Next, the string of lights, illuminating the stagnant tea-cup ride. Eventually, the Ferris wheel lights up again and to her great relief he comes back with it. The wheel starts spinning again, but the ride is now jolty and leaning to one side. Her grip loosening, she looks at him with pleading eyes.

“Please, help me,” she sobs.

Great big tears rim his eyes as he bends down, his smiling face next to hers, and starts singing in her ear. At last, her exhausted body lets go and she tumbles downward, belly flopping into a great void.

She wakes up to eyelids that feel glued together, a pounding head and a throat so parched it feels cracked. She tries to move, but a large rough hand stills her. Slowly she focuses on the large man standing beside her bed. His dark skin is perfect and his high cheekbones glow golden, even in the harsh fluorescent light. The room is white and coldly sterile.

She is in a hospital room. She opens her mouth, but says nothing, a million questions all fighting to get out first.

“Good morning,” he says in a chipper velvety voice as he looks at her chart, “you are a very lucky lady. You should play the Lotto,” he smiles kindly at her.

She tries to speak but he silences her gently.

“They pumped your stomach so your throat will feel scratched to pieces. You are very fortunate. Your family called the police when no one could get hold of you,” the nurse smooths the white sheets around her and gives her hand a quick squeeze. “People will be coming to visit you in a few of hours. Get some rest.”

She lies back in the hospital bed, the crisp white sheets crackling around her, hoping, for the first time, sleep would not come.

The Mountain

By Claire Cliff

The vineyards are dyed deep blue by the moonless night. Ruan trudges quickly in front of me, his safety boots smashing against the grass. We are silent between the rows of brown branches that spread out like fingers, recently emptied of the grapes that they clutched and carried. He ducks under the trellises into the next row. We travel hastily and wordlessly up the hill and through the dark. We're heading to the fence at the top of the farm where the wire has broken: the flimsy shoreline between this property and the mountain.

Ruan quickly scrambles over a stone wall and helps me up before we walk the steep incline towards the highest point of the farm. Here, the olive grove tangles itself into the sloped, flat rocks. This grove is one of the oldest in the country and produces olives without much intervention. The two horses, now in the paddock, have always been afraid to come up this high. This part of the farm feels as if it belongs to no one. Ruan is ahead of me, waiting by the tear in the bordering fence. I stop for a moment and wave to him before bending to put my hands on my knees, surprised by the toil of the uphill. I catch my breath before turning to face Ruan, who is crouched next to the rip.

"How long does this route take at night?" I ask breathlessly.

"It's about 20 minutes. Maybe longer."

"It's very dark out."

"Sorry Anton, I thought the moon would be out. We can still do it, we must just walk carefully from here," he says.

A small silence gathers around us. I straighten myself and I pause for a moment before I ask the next question.

“Ruan, why tonight?”

He doesn't answer. Instead, he shuffles through the hole in the fence and holds it open for me from the other side, avoiding any issues that may come from my poor depth perception. We stand now on a dirt path that winds its way up the mountain. On weekends, cars curl slowly through the road, when picnic goers and hikers alike make their way to the top of the mountain. We cross the road and make our way to the small trail that leads directly into the bushes. This used to be our entry point into a world we knew as well as we did the farm. We were just at the age where we were left to our own devices, when we first started heading into the mountain to reach the dam. Ruan and I are pushing forty now and climbing up through the thicket there was something fundamentally different about the journey. In those days we were three precocious cousins, sunburning ourselves endlessly as we whipped and twisted through the mountain. Now, although Ruan still speaks to me in the same stilted English, the language holds no space for what we can't translate from the tongue of our past.

We work our way higher in silence, following the sound of water, as if it formed our path to the dam. Just then, Ruan stops, staring over the slope of the landscape. Deep in the dark of the mountain, against the black of the sky, there is a house resting on the parallel crest, glowing orange. As I see it, I freeze too. The blood runs out of my face leaving my cheeks colder than the late summer night.

“Look who's home,” Ruan says softly. I stare out at the house, the only candle in the dark.

“Please Ruan, we can't go to her tonight.”

We both stand, motionless. As suddenly as he stopped, Ruan pivots his course and missions towards the house. I hesitate, resisting my urge to follow him blindly. But, as many times before, I come up short of leaving him to do things alone. My legs move underneath me and make their way after him. We come down from the thicket to meet the main road and we walk along it, hurriedly and in silence. Following this route takes

us up the hill, and a way above the house, as we see the moonlight shimmering in a puddle, we know we have found the lowest point of the road. This is our indication that we are close. We start feeling the foliage next to the road for the tell-tale gap in the branches. We find it, and we lower ourselves gingerly off the angled drop. Bent back with our legs out in front of us, we make our way down the path. We reach the mountain stream's concrete overflow and stop for a moment against the cold block. I bend over the trickle leading from the overflow and wash the dirt off my hands. I move to the other side of the structure so Ruan can do the same. We make our way down into the clearing, now in full sight of the house.

We walk past the clothing line with its hanging bag of clothes pegs, and we walk past the single outside chair and its accompanying table, holding only an ashtray piled up with waterlogged cigarette butts. We know to knock on the back door, rather than to walk past the windows to the front. Ruan looks stern, but I know he is nervous to be the one to announce us. I step forward and deliver five knocks to the door of the witch's house.

We both stand with our ears towards the house. First there is nothing. Then, the clink of a pot. The door opens a crack, and the witch's black eye peeps at us. The door swings open and there she stands; smaller than we remember, yes, but just as old as she was nearly three decades ago. She steps out of her doorway and twirls on her feet, using one hand to grab mine and putting the other against Ruan's back. She pushes gently against Ruan and he walks into her kitchen as she guides me along after her. The kitchen is golden with candlelight, and the stove is lit with a kettle set atop it. She clucks and shoos us from the kitchen to our seats on the two leather armchairs in the living room. Then the witch disappears. Ruan and I look at each other while the kitchen bursts with the sounds of clanking teacups. The witch comes out with a tray holding a teapot and three teacups. She sets it down in front of us and hurriedly starts pouring our tea, spilling the hot and barely brewed water over the saucers.

"Hello, Granny," I say, looking downwards

“Hello, my darling. It’s been a long time since you two were here.”

“Yes, Granny, but we’ve been thinking of you,” Ruan says.

“Ag, sweet man,” she says. “I saw you two looking over the koppie there. I’m glad you came but you must come by in the day, you two shouldn’t be on the mountain at night.”

“We’re big enough now Granny,” Ruan says.

“No, my darling, you are not. You know how fickle this mountain can be, it might come after you, too.”

The witch knows why we are here tonight. Ruan asks the witch for some sugar for his tea. She pulls herself off the couch and goes to fetch him some. When she comes back, Ruan first puts two sugars into my tea before adding three to his own. It never mattered to him that I stopped drinking sugar in my tea in Standard 8.

“I’m sorry to hear about your mother, Anton,” the witch says to me after she’s settled.

I’m caught off guard. “How did you hear, Granny?”

“I’m as much part of the town as the mountain is my baby.”

“Thank you very much, Granny, for thinking of me. You would have liked her a lot.”

The witch pauses for a moment. “I did like her, yes. This is why Ruan brought you up here tonight, hey? You’re going to the dam. One tragedy has you thinking about another.”

Ruan is looking intently into his teacup. I say nothing.

“I wasn’t the one to drown that boy the same way I wasn’t the one to knock out your eye, Anton. And even if it was so, neither can be undone.”

“Yes, Granny,” I say.

“Tsk. But still, you don’t visit.”

We both shift in our chairs, washed in shame from the witch’s scolding. We have nothing to say to defend ourselves, apart from “we were just children”, “we were scared you would eat us”, “we stopped climbing through the hole in the fence that day”, “we came back when we were fourteen and your house was gutted by a fire, your windows were knocked out, and your ashtray was gone”. We have nothing to say. There is nothing to say.

The witch tuts to herself and stands up. As I push back the last sip of my tea, I feel her quietly lay a blanket over me. I see Ruan looking over, watching carefully. Granny’s hand touches my face and I feel the warmth of my childhood sun come with it. I gently adjust the blanket to cover my legs.

“We’re lucky we’re too big to eat now, hey,” I say softly, looking down as Granny tucks a pillow behind my head.

Granny laughs, but Ruan’s hand is cold on my shoulder.

“Granny, it’s been lovely to see you, and we promise we will come again, but we must go now, or we won’t be able to get to the reservoir before the sun comes up.”

With that, Ruan pulls me out of my seat with the swiftness of a thief and out the door we flurry. As our departure dawns on, the house’s golden glow changes. The walls blacken, the floor rubbles, the support beams crack. The warmth of the witch’s home becomes the sweltering of the mountain fire. Ruan pulls me through the back door of the kitchen, now ablaze and collapsing fast as we make our way out into the night. The chill of the mountain is gone now, too. Instead, the mountain is alight in orange and red. We cross the clearing, jump the overflow, and hastily make our way back up the smoking mountain path. Once we reach the road, we pause to survey the transformed landscape. Their path to the

reservoir, spiralling up through the topography, seethes, and simmers with fire. I stare into the heat before I feel a tug on my elbow, and in the same way as before my feet follow Ruan as he leads me to safety. Back down the mountain, through the hastening black-to-grey-to-blue, through the still-green greenery and the still-cool metal of the hole in the fence we flurry. The reservoir trip was pointless anyway. The ghost of a drowned friend from long ago could not offer us much in the line of guidance, the past could never offer us enough to help us make sense of the now. The now alone pushes us down to the storeroom, where we go to find the early comers readying themselves for work. Calls are to be made. While the vineyards still hold grapes and while the olive groves still twist, the work of this sunlit morning is to keep the fire off the farm.

About the Authors

Petrus van Staden:

Petrus van Staden is a filmmaker and storyteller. His films have been shown at festivals in over 30 countries, winning multiple awards. The basis of all his work is on the firm belief that story is the most powerful medium to effect positive change in the world.

Busisiwe Mahlangu:

Busisiwe Mahlangu is a poet from Mamelodi, Pretoria. Her debut collection 'Surviving Loss' was adapted for theatre at the SA State Theatre. Mahlangu is the winner of the inaugural SA National Poetry Prize. Her work is published in New Contrast, Wild Imperfections, Atlanta Review, New Coin, Yesterdays and Imagining Realities, and other literary magazines.

Thendo Netshivhera:

Thendo Netshivhera (Mukwevho) was born in Thohoyandou in 1992. A seasoned scholar and alumni of NWU, Wits and Unisa. His poems have appeared in 'a poem a day' by Poetry Potion. He is currently working on a debut collection of short stories, to be published in mid-year 2022.

Kgotla Seitshiro:

Kgotla Seitshiro is a 38-year-old IT business analyst by profession. Creative writing has been their outlet since high school. Only recently have they decided to pursue it seriously hence the degree. They are hoping to find their niche soon; be it translations, songwriting, or publishing poetry.

Almaaz Salie:

Almaaz Salie is a 24-year-old that adores venturing into fantastical, unknown places, with the dream of emulating that experience of utter envelopment through their own writing. Whilst they are currently in their final year of a Bachelor of Arts in Creative Writing, their aspiration is to become a published author, with the hopes of also pursuing the art of script writing for film and TV.

Mandia Bornman:

Mandia Bornman is passionate about people, literature and languages. She enjoys travelling to explore foreign cultures, religions and food, and dreams of becoming a commercially published writer.

Shaleen Jacobs:

Shaleen Jacobs is 33 years old, and was born in Kraaifontein, Cape Town, currently residing in Bellville. She is a South African volunteer for OCSA, an American non-profit organization, and doing their BA in Creative Writing, at UNISA. Her first novel Joseph will be published soon through Krest Publishers.

Robyn Waters:

Robyn Waters is a Creative Writing student and a singer. Her goals with writing are to become a fiction author, but also to write motivational articles aimed to inspire others to want to overcome the circumstances that don't serve them, and to voice their own stories.

Jayde Carlynnne Haupt:

Jayde Haupt is a 34-year-old female who resides in Cape Town with her family. She works for an airline in Sales and Commercial, but her passion will always be literature. In 2019, she decided to study BA Creative Writing through UNISA as she would like to share some of her stories to the world as well one day and hopefully gain a place next to some of her favourite authors.

Mpine Letlala:

Mpine Letlala is a Creative Writing student. She is a dreamer, a lover of language and the beauty of the pen. A storyteller. Believing that words are a legacy, she plans on continuing to learn and produce well-written poetry and stories worth reading and leaving behind as treasure.

Robyn De Lange:

Robyn De Lange is a freelance writer, specializing in screenwriting. She loves books, fantasy, and animation. She's currently working on a variety of projects and getting her degree in creative writing. Her goals as a writer are to branch out into other mediums, continuously improve her craft and create unforgettable stories.

Safiyya Jogee:

Safiyya Jogee is a 22-year-old writer. She loves reading books and watching movies. The art of storytelling has always been a significant part of her life and she hopes to one day create worlds and characters that bring others joy and allows them to dream. She plans to further her studies in Creative Writing.

Chrisné Venter:

Chrisné Venter started writing poetry as an escape from this world and soon found solace in the art of writing. She believes that it is the reason she chose to pursue a career in Creative Writing and is also the reason why she teaches the youth of today the love they can find within literature.

Pumla Jafta:

Pumla Jafta, a 50-year-old “empty-nester”, lives with her husband in the rural town of Willowvale in the Eastern Cape. Her rural setting, work in her take away store and studies through UNISA feed her imagination to add a plot and produces poems and stories. In her dreams she is always clinching an Oscar for best Foreign Screenplay.

Claire Clift:

Claire Clift was born in Paarl, Western Cape and is an English Teacher at Stellenbosch University. After leaving a career in the beauty industry in 2020, she started her pursuit of an undergraduate degree in Creative Writing. Her poetic work documents the peculiarities of provincial living.

Janice Mamukwa:

Janice Mamukwa is a Zimbabwean writer and EFL teacher. She has lived in Germany, Austria and recently moved to England. There, she writes poetry and short stories in English, Shona, and German, the three languages that fight for dominance in her creative practice. In September 2022, she will begin her Master's studies at the University of Oxford.

Nivonne Jackson:

Nivonne Jackson is currently a debtor's manager at Mass Hire Emalahleni and studying part-time BA Creative Writing through Unisa. They are a writing devotee, who would be exhilarated to publish their own poetry anthology. They take great delight in writing competitions and have won among others the Avbob poetry competition where three of their poems have been selected and published.

Matthew Lance Kent:

Matthew Lance Kent is an aspiring writer born in Cape Town, South Africa. They work as an online English teacher. Matthew has always had a passion for reading but has only discovered their passion for writing relatively recently. They enjoy writing poetry, fiction, lyrics, and scholarly articles, and will look to pursue a career in one of these niches.

Caitlin Hancocks:

Caitlin Hancocks is a South African writer, artist and cinephile. She is working to create a career in which her three passions assemble, allowing her to realise the stories of the exploration and beauty of shared realities that make up the daydream that is the human experience.

Rentia Weber:

Rentia Weber always wanted to travel, meet interesting people, read fiction, watch foreign films, and wear eccentric clothes. Aged 10, she wrote that she wanted to become a 'long and thin' airhostess, so she became a flight attendant and was able to do everything mentioned above. But she also wanted to be a mother, a writer, a TV presenter, and a makeup-artist, and continue studying Afrikaans, her favourite subject of all.

Tracy Cook:

Tracy Cook has a background in wellness, but from a very young age, wanted to be a writer and has always had many journals and notebooks tucked away. Pursuing a degree in creative writing and realising this dream has opened so many opportunities, and she looks forward to finding her niche within the writing world as her journey continues.

Noluthando Mokoena:

Noluthando Mokoena is a creative that's devoted to discovering every layer of creativity entrenched in their DNA. With it, they wish to create change, awareness, and be a voice to societal, socio-economic, and world injustices. They also love life, and all its adversities, hence they also inspire to evoke a sense of hope, joy, love, and peace through their work.

Jennifer du Plessis:

Jennifer du Plessis is currently a second-year student of a bachelor's degree in Creative Writing (yes, it's a real degree, Mom). If she could achieve one thing with her writing, it would be world domination – the pen is mightier than the sword, after all. For now, she'll simply endeavour to write and publish her own novels.

Augustina Khosa:

Augustina Khosa was born in Daveyton. He is currently working as a correctional officer and is a student at the University of South Africa. He is a writer of short stories, poetry, novels, and political essays. His goal as a writer is to publish her work.

Gelisé van de Vorst

Gelisé van de Vorst is a student, reader, people-watcher and aspiring writer who is currently living in Dublin, Ireland, with her husband and dog, where she hopes to remain a life-long student and lover of the arts. She plans to start working on her first novel, as soon as she makes it through her “to-read list”.

AS ANAÏS NIN SAID:
“ WE WRITE TO TASTE LIFE TWICE.
IN THE MOMENT AND IN RETROSPECT.”

No single collection of poems and short stories can encapsulate the range of human emotions both as part of living in the South African country and beyond its borders. Nevertheless, *Wistfulness of Time* offers a selection of poems and short stories that embody the theme of nostalgia and the idea of memory. From artists such as Petrus van Staden, Busisiwe Mahlangu, Janice Kudakwashe Mamukwa, Shaleen Jacobs, Thendo Netshivhera, Nivonne Jackson and many other students at the University of South Africa, this anthology was born, the first of many to come.

Despite the diversity of voices and the various depictions of the theme, these students have been successful in giving a voice to and describing the human condition. They are well on their way to carving their mark alongside the many great artists of South Africa and the world.

Wistfulness OF TIME

WORKS BY THE STUDENTS OF
UNISA'S BA IN CREATIVE WRITING

Edited by Caitlin Hancocks and Safiyya Jogee

Foreword by Alwyn Roux

