

love songs for nheti and other tales by NOKUTHULA MAZIBUKO

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**for shandu**

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## 1. love songs for nheti

Oh no!! There he was again! Singing those stupid, stupid songs. Nheti was peering through the dining room curtain, at the short round little boy just outside her gate, singing at the top of his voice:

*You are as wonderful, as the autumn breeze,*

*With you I will never sneeze*

*I love youuuuuuuuu!!*

*I love you Nhetiiiiiiii!!*

*You are like the sun the moon!!*

*My dear dear Nheti!!!!*

This was the fourth love song Vusi was singing outside Nheti's gate, and she had had ENOUGH. Since they were about five Vusi had decided that he was in love with Nheti, and was going to marry her. He lived around the corner from Nheti's house and was convinced that Nheti was the prettiest girl in Soweto, and surely all the angels in heaven looked like her!! Vusi and Nheti were now nearly seven years old, and in school, and Vusi was still determined to make Nheti his beloved. Whenever he saw Nheti, he would smile as though he was lost.

Vusi first made his intentions clear one spring day by running up to Nheti when she was not looking, giving her two quick kisses and then running off. He tried to do this as often as he could, which was not very often because each time he tried to kiss Nheti, she would

swing punches at him. Once when he wasn't quick to run away, Nheti landed a solid punch - "doof!" - on Vusi's head. Since then, he tried to run away faster after stealing kisses, which was not easy given his ample weight.

Vusi was determined. One day Nheti would realise they were meant to be together. One day...But because getting close to his beloved and kissing her, was a bit hazardous, Vusi had to think of some other way to share his love. A way that would not require proximity to the apple of his eye. That's when the idea of singing love songs to Nheti hit him! Nheti loved music, and she loved to dance, so Vusi would present her with the thing she loved most- MUSIC! Brilliant! Why didn't he think of this before?! He could sing the songs at a distance, safe from his beloved! He had memorized enough love song lyrics from the radio, to get him started. Nevermind that he often substituted his own lyrics so that "you are the apple of my eye", easily turned to "you are the apple and the sky"! Vusi loved singing, and he planned to polish up and learn more songs for his beloved!! He was going to sing sweet love songs for Nheti from now until eternity! His melodic soprano voice would be completely dedicated to the most beautiful of angels...

*You are like roses in spring*

*Let's sit on the swing*

*Let us be together forever....Nheti! Nheti!*

The image of Vusi at Nheti's gate holding his round stomach with one hand, and the other dramatically stretched out, whilst he sang the latest love hits, provided free entertainment for passers by. They took one look at Vusi and collapsed with laughter.

Those who knew Nheti, teased her saying “Hey Nheti I think I hear Vusi singing... uyamuzwa umkhwenyana ekuculela kamnandi”. They would also say what an odd pair they would make on their wedding day, because Vusi is short and fat, and Nheti is tall and thin. Nheti found Vusi’s crooning embarrassing. She had to get that fat fool to stop.

*You are like an engine [angel]*

*I will call you hazel*

*Your name is like music*

*Oh my dear Nheti!*

As Vusi was singing heartily with his eyes closed, he felt a big splash of water all over. When he opened his eyes he saw his beloved standing in front of him, scowling. “Vusi, stop singing outside my gate. Go home! Uzubuye futhi, ngizok’phinda!”

Vusi, not feeling much like a confrontation with his beloved, ran as fast as he could. It was only when he reached the corner that he turned to blow a quick kiss to Nheti. She angrily waved the empty bucket at him, to say “next time you’ll get two buckets!”.

Nheti was about to happily go back into the house, pleased that she had gotten rid of the menace Vusi, when her grandmother, Nkgono, blocked her way. “Nheti! What do you think you are doing wasting water?!”

“But, but Nkgono....”

“Don’t BUT Nkgono me, I’ll pinch those silly ears of yours!” Nkgono was not amused, sometimes her granddaughter could be a handful. It’s because she lives in a house full of boys. And now she’s behaving like her four older brothers. Nkgono had moved in with

her daughter, Nheti's mother, right after she married, and started having children and working. She wanted to help her daughter through pregnancies, childbirth and raising the buggers. She worried that she sometimes spoilt this Nheti, that's another reason why she misbehaved! She was plain spoilt!

"Nkgono, it's Vusi he stands at the gate and sings!" Nheti tried to win Nkgono over.

"So! What's wrong with singing?! Has singing ever killed anyone?! Heh?!"

"No Nkgono...but people laugh" Nheti mumbled.

"Get in the house and do your schoolwork, I don't want to see you playing with water again. My child works very hard to pay for that water. Kemehlolo kannete!"

Nheti rushed into the house, her temporary victory squashed. She would have to talk to Zaza, her best friend, about how to take care of that fat fool Vusi. Zaza always came up with good plans. She would know just what to do!

The following day Vusi was it again. Striking his dramatic pose, hand on round belly, the other outstretched, and singing like there was no tomorrow.

*When I see birds fly*

*I really ask why*

*My love for you*

*Is like a shoe [is so blue]*

*Ohh Nheti! Nheti!!*

*I want to say...*

*Let's pie [fly] away!!*

As he was busy serenading the lovely Nheti, Vusi felt something small and hard hit him on his head. Before he could sing another note, more small stones hit him on the arm, on his legs, and then a whole lot rained on him. Nheti and Zaza, came from behind the small backyard shrub, and pelted Vusi with the rest of the stones in their hands. Vusi was not about to let his beloved, and her strange friend Zaza, stone him to death. He ran as fast as he could away from Nheti's gate down the road, and disappeared around the corner. Nheti and Zaza were beside themselves with laughter. The sight of fat Vusi trying to duck their stones was just too much for them!!! Zaza's stone-throwing-plan worked! They were able to execute it fast and furious, before Nkgono could come out of the house and ask them what all the noise was about.

Zaza and Nheti were so happy with their plan, they decided to walk down the street, and reward themselves with chocolate sweets. They had enough cents to buy two sweets each!!! As the two friends walked down the street, kicking stones with their shoes, they planned how they would pelt that fat fool Vusi the next time he tried singing. The friends were convinced that the menace would be no more. But they did not want to take any chances. They would collect a heap of stones, just in case...

They did not have to wait long...The following afternoon, as they tried to rush through their homework, they heard Vusi's soprano wafting in through the open windows and door.

*Nheti sithandwa! Ngithanda wena wedwa!*

*I love you only*

*Don't leave me slowly [lonely]*

*You are my baby*

*Don't say to me wayweee [maybe]*

*We belong together*

*Like birds of a weather [feather]*

*The sky is so blue*

*That's what I feel for you!!!!*

The girls jumped up from the kitchen table grabbed the stones they had collected and rushed outside.

Nkgono was gossiping up the street with MaNdaba, so Zaza and Nheti could executive their malicious plan with abundant glee! But the sight at the gate stopped them dead in their tracks. There was Vusi, the lovesick crooner, not in familiar singing pose (one hand on round stomach, and the other dramatically stretched out), but in a cardboard shield of armor! To protect himself from being stoned to death by his beloved, and her crazy friend, Vusi had made himself a protective suit out of cardboard. It was quite easy to organise, he just went to the spaza shop and asked for a long biggish box, in which he made two holes in front. So when he put the biggish box over his head, his body was almost completely covered. He could not move too fast, but at least he could see where he was going. And he was able to find his way to his beloved's gate, and serenade her!

*The summer rain*

*Makes me eeaaaayy [insane]*

*My love for you*

*Is morning stew [dew]*

*Please wipe my tears*

*I'll wine [pine] for years*

*For your sweet love*

*My yani [honey] dove*

*Oh oh oh Nheti!!!*

Zaza and Nheti were completely taken by surprise! The fat fool was wearing an armor suite! Nheti tried in vain to hit Vusi with the stones, but they just hit the card board armor, and plonked to the ground. Vusi was very pleased with his ingenious plan. He continued to croon louder and louder!!! The sight was too much for Zaza who was giggling uncontrollably. Nheti started to run after Vusi, so she could punch him, but then someone in the street shouted ‘Look Nheti is running after her sweetheart Vusi!’ So rather than embarrass herself further, Nheti sulked into the house, leaving Zaza in stitches on the grass.

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*Twenty years later, Nheti and Vusi’s wedding was attended by at least two hundred or so people. Friends, relatives, work colleagues, and gatecrashers! Nheti looked beautiful in a cream silk dress that her friend Zaza, now a famous dress designer, had made for her. Zaza was of course the best lady, and she looked stunning in her very own yellow design. There was plenty of stew, rice and different coloured vegetables for a wedding feast. Ginger beer, ginger cakes and mqombothi was enough for the beautifully dressed guests. When everyone had eaten, they sang and danced to their hearts content, ululating ‘hilibilileeeee!!!’ and laughing with joy. Those who knew the couple when they were*

*children never would have guessed that they would one day end up married. One of the speakers even entertained guests with stories of how Vusi, used to stand at Nheti's gate and sing her love songs from the radio. And how Nheti's grandmother, feeling sorry for her favorite grandchild, intervened and told the chubby little boy to stop making noise at her gate or she would pinch his ears, and put a curse on him so he would not utter another word for the rest of his life! Vusi was terrified of Nkgono so he stopped his crooning. But then he got the idea to start leaving chocolate sweets (which he knew his beloved loved) on Nheti's desk at school...that is why the couple decided to present their guests with thank you notes and some prettily wrapped up chocolate sweets!!! And they lived happily ever after...their happiness amplified by Vusi's love songs every other morning sweetly in his beloveds ear...*

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## **2. the doll**

Nheti was not sure about the dark brown moSotho doll her father had just given her for her birthday. She had just turned seven, and was really looking forward to her birthday present. She was expecting to get a nice white doll with very long golden blond hair. She didn't mind if it was one of those baby dolls like the one her friend Zaza had. Zaza's baby doll has glistening blue-green eyes, and more importantly, curly gold locks that she brushed and brushed, and sometimes let Nheti brush as well. And Sonto from up the road, had a doll that was tall and thin, with bright red lips and straight blond hair. Sonto's doll wore a bright pink polyester skirt, a bright pink polyester top, and had a bright pink plastic comb. She also sometimes let Nheti brush her doll's long, long straight golden hair. But what Nheti really wished for, and what she was hoping her father would buy her for her birthday, was her very own white doll with golden hair that she could comb, brush and style.

Nheti had hoped to get such a doll, the previous Christmas, instead her teacher father, Bab'Langa had given her story books. She really enjoyed reading the story books with their bright coloured pictures, and people who could visit the moon, and talk to animals, but she really would have liked a doll with long blond hair. Nheti had hoped and hoped she would get the doll for her sixth birthday, but no, she got a miniature baking set. Which was very nice, she baked lots of mud cakes with Zaza, Sonto and Busi. But the doll would have been really really nice. And now, on her seventh birthday, her father had

bought her a doll. A dark brown moSotho doll, wearing a green seShweshwe print dress, a brown and blue baSotho blanket around her shoulders, and a straw hat. This moSotho doll, had black very tight curls on its head! Nheti could not hide her disappointment! There was no way she could brush this doll's hair. Bab'Langa could see the look of disappointment on his newly seven daughter's face "What's wrong Nkosazana, don't you like the doll?"

Nheti tried hard not to seem ungrateful, "Ehm, it's nice Baba...but....."

"Just look at how nicely she's dressed" enthused Bab'Langa "...we should give her a name, what do you want to call your birthday doll? Aaaha I know! Call her Letti!! Nheti and Letti!!!" Bab'Langa chuckled gleefully.

"Ehm Baba, didn't they have dolls with gold hair?" Nheti asked tentatively....

"Hau, my precious, but this is a moSotho doll!!! I had to look all over for it! In this country, they don't make black dolls you know! We have to be black and proud Nkosazana!" Bab'Langa never missed an opportunity to instill pride in his daughter.

"But Baba...this doll....you can't comb it's hair..." said Nheti.

"But you don't need to comb it's hair baby girl! It has a hat!" said Bab'Langa triumphantly.

But Nheti was not convinced. She wanted to sit for hours like Zaza and Sonto, and comb golden locks. Maybe she could ask her father to take the doll back, and get her a proper doll with proper golden locks. She wasn't so fussy about the dolls eyes, they could be brown or green or blue. But she had to be able to comb the hair, and she wanted the hair to be gold, and shine in the sun, just like Zaza, and Sonto's dolls.

This moSotho doll with her colorful blanket was just not on. Nheti couldn't believe her hard luck. Her one chance to own a pretty doll, and Baba had messed it up. Unlike some of her friends, Nheti did not have sisters to share clothes and dolls with. She had three elder brothers who mainly ignored her, and played soccer till late at night.

“Baba...” tried Nheti, her voice careful and slow “Why don't you exchange THIS doll and get one with long hair that I can comb. You know, like the ones uZaza noSonto have?”

When Nheti's mother, who was busy preparing a special birthday lunch, heard her daughter try to convince her husband to take back the carefully chosen present, she lost her patience “Nheti other children do not even have food to eat! And here you are with a whole birthday present, and you are not even grateful!” Mrs. Langa never passed up the chance to let her children know just how lucky they were to have a mother and a father who cared for them, by providing food everyday, and saved up enough to buy small presents on birthdays and at Christmas. After all in South Africa, 1975, many black people went to bed without food. The white apartheid government in power made sure that the majority black people were landless, uneducated and poor! “uBaba is not taking back that doll! Say thank you, and give your a father kiss!”

Nheti knew she could never win against her mother. She thanked her father and kissed him on the cheek.

Nheti tried hard to enjoy her mother's special birthday food, stew and dumpling, with birthday cake afterwards. Her parents, brothers and friends sang for her, and wished her to grow up and be wise and old. But all the time, Nheti was thinking of how she could somehow get a proper doll. When her friends gathered around her to admire her new doll, Nheti tried to convince Zaza, to swap her baby doll for her new moSotho doll. Zaza was

not sure. The doll's hair would be very difficult to comb... Sonto had the same concern. It was an interesting looking doll, none like they'd seen before – the blanket was a nice touch. But the friends did not agree to swap.

That is until, Zaza's baby doll had a little accident. Soon after Nheti's birthday, Zaza tragically dropped her doll on a primus stove. The doll's plastic hand was totally singed. But her hair was still in tact, so Nheti once again offered to swap her friend, saying her moSotho doll had both hands. Zaza, agreed. After all, her mother would get her another doll with hair she could comb, for HER next birthday...

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### **3. in a name**

Nheti's Mama remembers with love and tears in her eyes the day her daughter was born. It was very early on a bitterly cold winter's morning. She was in labour for a grand eight hours, when suddenly, with the power of ten bulls, her bundle of joy forced her way, screaming and disgruntled into the world. The baby girl cried for a good ten or so minutes, clearly not happy to have left her liquid comfort. It was three in the morning, on the thirteenth of August, 1968. MaLanga was secretly pleased that she had given birth to a girl. She already had four sons, and was hoping for someone to dress up, and later share insights about being a woman. She did not share these secret wishes with her husband, Bab'Langa, because he would lecture her about “a child being a child being a child – male or female...”. MaLanga fell immediately in love with her daughters' wrinkled face, her heart broke in anticipation of future happinesses and hurts. Like with all her children, MaLanga, had prayed long and hard that the good Lord shape the baby growing inside her into a beautiful, intelligent, kind being, and if it wasn't too much trouble if the being could be shaped into a girl, that would of course be an added bonus... Bab'Langa was equally besotted and amazed by the birth of his baby girl. So much so that he was eager to settle the whole matter of the child's name; his princess deserved to be given a name as soon as possible. She had to be given a name befitting her future standing in society. There was no doubt in Bab'Langa's mind that his baby girl would be somebody one day. He immediately imagined her as one of the world's top heart surgeons, or a jazz great like Ella Fitzgerald or Miriam Makeba!

If the child was going to be somebody, he or she needed a somebody's kid of name! He already had a long list of African royal names that his wife could pick from. Being a schoolteacher, Bab'Langa had covered his basis and written the names down, so that his beloved wife could wrap her eyes, ears and lips around the sounds. He had taken care also to write a bit about the royal origins of each name so as to inspire MaLanga to name their Joy appropriately.

Bab'Langa waited a few days after his wife's arrival from hospital to bring up the urgent matter of their daughter's name. He had to get his timing just right. He waited for Saturday morning, when the boys were out playing soccer, and the house was nice and quiet. He put on Coltrane's *Love Supreme*, softly, so as not to agitate mother and infant. He sat next to his wife, as she suckled the baby on the bed, and softly cleared his throat. "Sweetie, the baby is three days old now..."he ventured. MaLanga was tired and not in the mood for mind reading...

"Yes, and?" she asked impatiently.

"Well the baby needs a name...you know, so I've written down several possibilities..." he smiled warmly at his wife, hoping to soften her heart with his dimples.

"Isaac, the baby has a name, I have meditated long and hard about this, and Nomsa is her name." MaLanga closed her eyes, a clear sign that the matter was resolved.

Bab'Langa moved closer to his wife, and kissed her on the cheek, gently, sweetly, appealing to her sense of fairness. "But Sweetie, how about the name Nandi?! Just listen to that Nandi" He said the name slowly, mysteriously, softly. He continued in this subdued and dignified tone, "...Nandi was the mother of one of the Zulu people's greatest kings Ushaka. Nandi, an outcast and rebel of the Langa people, my people, rose and led

the people! It was Nandi who inspired and advised the great Shaka! Nandi, Ndabezitha!!!” Bab'Langa's eyes were growing wider with his rising voice, and he ended his praises of Nandi wide-eyed and looking far into the distance.

“Keep your voice down, I am trying to make Nomsa sleep.” MaLanga was not buying into her husband's royal talk. Nomsa was a beautiful name which means kindness, and that is the name she wanted her daughter to live up to. Again she closed her eyes.

“Ok, ok, Sweetie, if the name Nandi does not impress you what about ...” appreciating the impact of drama, Bab"Langa paused briefly”...Mnkabayi ka Jama! Mnkabayi, warrior princess, who ruled for a few years before her brother Senzangakhona and led the Zulu's in many victorious battles!!!”

“So you want our beloved child to be a war-monger? That is what you want for our one and only daughter, huh?” MaLanga was becoming agitated.

“OK, ok, not Mnkabayi. But I did some research on queen Nzingha of Angola, ruled from 1585-1663...”

“Forget it. She was also fighting wars and all kinds of things wasn't she?”

Bab'Langa persisted, “They were wars of resistance, wars against colonialism”

To drive her point home, MaLanga started humming a lullaby for the suckling infant

“Thula, thu, thula Nomsa, thula thula....”

Bab'Langa was losing hope, “...Sweetie, you won't even consider naming our little one Yaa Asantewa? She fought bravely against the British who wanted to take over her 'Gold Coast'...Or Makheda! Hhe! That's the Queen of Sheba, wife to our ancestor the wise King Solomon! Mind you Sheba matched Solomon – can you imagine the brainpower in that house?! Hhe! Wait a minute...I have the perfect name for our princess...”

MaLanga continued her gentle lullaby throughout her husband's names frenzy.

“...I have the perfect name...”enthused Bab'Langa with glazed eyes...”...Nefertiti!!! The Sun Queen of Egypt!! Nerfetiti, the beautiful! That's it! That's her name!”

“We are not naming our daughter after a queen far away in Egypt, who lived ...I don't know how long ago...” MaLanga wiped her brow, and put the know sleeping infant down. “Nomsa and I are taking a nap...” she promptly shut her eyes and fell asleep.

Bab'Langa was not happy with the names issue. He had backed down when his wife insited on naming their first three children. He had wanted to give them royal names like Shaka, and Moshoeshoe, but had to settle for Thami, Sizwe, and Phila. This time he was not backing down. He was sticking by his guns, his daughter would be named Nefertiti, the beautiful! Bab'Langa decided to give his wife the 'silent treatment', and keep words between them to an absolute minimum. He sulked around the house and hardly ate anything. After a few days, MaLanga had had enough. She sat her husband down, “Sweetie, let's talk about this name thing...”

“I want our daughter named Nefertiti, the beautiful sun queen of ancient Egypt.”Bab'Langa sulked.

“OK. Nefertiti it is...” Bab'Langa couldn't believe his ears! Did his wife just agree to his choice of name? Impossible...

“We can give Nomsa the name Nerfertiti as a second name. That's a nice compromise don't you think?” MaLanga smiled sweetly.

“Does that mean I can actually call her Nefertiti?” Bab'Langa couldn't quite believe his luck.

“You can call her Nefertiti, but in church and at school we introduce her as Nomsa. Now stop sulking and give me a kiss...” Bab'Langa gladly obliged, and immediately picked up his baby Nefertiti and started cooing ancient Egypt's history to her...”And the pyramids

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my baby, baby, the puyramids coodgie coodgi coodgie, what an ancient wonder! Built centuries ago, many, many, many centuries coodgi coodgie cooo, strong stone pyramids, an architectural wonder, oh yes a wonder!! Daddy's Nefertiti! Nefertiti!”

It didn't take long for Nefertiti to become Nheti. The Langa's youngest son, Phila, found Nefertiti too long and arduous on his tongue, so he promptly rechristened his baby sister Nheti. Everyone else thought Nheti close enough to Nefertiti, so Nheti it was. Poor Bab'Langa...

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#### **4.love story**

The booming drumbeat could be heard from quite a few houses away...

*Abagulayo bayeza kusasa bayeza...*

*Abagulayo bayeza kusasa bayeza...*

*The sick will come tomorrow,*

*Tomorrow they will come...*

The healer sang the refrain as if beating the devil out of the young girl crouching in front of her over a bowl of steaming water mixed with various healing herbs. The girl, lost in the rhythm, inhaled deeply the soothing steam.

The powerful drum beat attracted a small curious crowd who whispered among themselves that the young woman had come to be cured of a love not returned. She was unlucky, and in love with a young man who does not love her back, so she came to the Sangoma for help.

Young girls listened wide-eyed, and wished what had happened to the woman, never ever happened to them. The old people whispered that love nearly killed the girl, and hopefully the healer would help her regain her strength.

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The young woman was called Zodwa, “the only one”. She was the only child born to well off parents who owned small grocery shops in Soweto. Zodwa attended the Catholic school up the road from her home. Always doing well at her schoolwork, the nuns who were her teachers had hoped she would join them, and serve their Lord and Master. But Zodwa had other ideas. She dreamt of one day becoming a respected nurse, and wearing the starched white nurses' uniform. And if she was going to be a nurse, she would have to marry an equally distinguished doctor of medicine. So when Zodwa graduated from the Catholic high school, she applied to the coastal university seven hundred kilometers away from her home.

The sky fell on Zodwa's high school sweetheart Patrick, when she told him the university had accepted her application, and she would soon board a train and go. Patrick had applied to the university to study medicine. Being top of his class, his marks, especially science and mathematics, were well over the required entrance percentage. He had been accepted to study; however, he was not granted the scholarship he needed to be able to go. Patrick's parents were poor, and barely managed to feed and school their four children. His mother's domestic worker wage, combined with his father's factory wage, meant they had for years struggled daily existing from hand to mouth. There was no university closer to Patrick's home that accepted blacks in the seventies, it was only the coastal medical school.

When Zodwa left a month or so later, Patrick joined his father as a trainee at the bottle factory. His plan was to work and save enough money to study and become a medical

doctor. Even though they were in love, Zodwa had told Patrick that she had to marry a respected professional. She loved Patrick, and had been proud to be the girlfriend of the smartest boy in class, but she was not going to marry a factory worker. So he had to make sure that he saved enough money to go to medical school.

The weeks and months raced by, Zodwa and Patrick, lived their distant lives. Zodwa tried to be as caring as possible so as to fit into the profession of Florence Nightingale. She studied hard and learnt the art of looking after the sick. On weekends she took a break, and with fellow students, caught a bus to the beach. Patrick quickly settled into the monotony of bottle polishing. He was at the tail end of a long line of depressed and hung-over workers. His job was to make sure that thousands of freshly made bottles got a nice once over with a polishing cloth, to make sure they reached the client in sparkling condition. Like his father, he got paid on Fridays, just enough to pay for the following week's bus fare, and food, and other necessities for his siblings who were still in school.

At the end of the year when Zodwa came home for holidays, the lovers were happy to be with each other. Zodwa looked happy and refreshed after spending a year at the seaside University. Patrick was tired and sad from polishing thousands of bottles. The lovers were ecstatic to see each other again. Although they exchanged letters frequently, they longed for the intimacy of seeing each other daily as they had done during their high school years. Zodwa was anxious to know if her beloved would be joining her soon. But Patrick had not managed to save enough tuition, let alone accommodation money. All his weekly wages went towards feeding and clothing his siblings, who were all still in school. He promised to try harder next year. He would forfeit his lunch of milk and

bread, as well as his weekly visits to the shebeen to drink away his sorrows with friends, he would also try to work as much overtime as possible to make extra money.

The rest of the summer holidays passed with the lovers intoxicated with each other. They would meet at sunset when Patrick arrived from work, and embrace the falling darkness, until their faces flickered in the candle light from surrounding houses. At nearly midnight, Zodwa would sneak back home, and hope to avoid her father's disapproving gaze.

Zodwa soon had to go back to her studies and face the year ahead. She missed Patrick terribly and wrote him letters often. That is, until she caught the eye of a new medical student, Siphwe. Like her, Siphwe had parents who were able to send him to study. He took an immediate interest in the beautiful Zodwa wearing her spotless white trainee nurses' uniform. He bought her sweets and cool drink from the canteen, and took her for drives to the beach in his old beetle. Patrick wondered why the letters from his beloved were getting fewer and fewer, he guessed that she must be extremely busy with her studies. But when Zodwa came for the summer holidays she ended her affair with Patrick saying, she had met and would soon marry a medical doctor, as soon as he qualified. She would wait the six long years it would take to become a doctor's wife.

She had already planned to work in the coastal town as a nurse when she qualified, so she could be close to Siphwe, and be able to give him the necessary support. Patrick was shattered. He missed a week of work, drinking at the shebeen. If it were not for his father's good relationship with the factory manager, he surely would have gotten fired.

Zodwa convinced herself that she was doing the right thing. Their love affair never would have worked, they were from different backgrounds, and were destined for different lives. She went back to Siphwe, only to find him chasing a girl who had just arrived to study her first year of nursing. Zodwa watched with horror and pain as Siphwe showered the girl with sweets and cool drinks from the canteen, and go for weekend drives to the beach with her. She wrote to her parents saying she no longer wanted to complete her studies, but wanted to come home instead. Her father threatened her saying he did not have money to waste and she had better complete the nursing course if she knew what was good for her. Zodwa stayed, and completed her course.

She came back to work at the clinic not far from her parents home. She became very excited to hear that soon after she left to complete her studies, her childhood love, Patrick had started attending the local teacher's training college. The nuns and brothers from their old Catholic school had heard that their top student was working in a factory polishing bottles, and decided to offer their help. They did not have much money, but they had enough to support Patrick at college to study to become a math and science teacher. And they would pay him a small amount to hold extra math and science classes for their students on Saturdays. So Patrick stopped being a tired and sad factory worker, and launched enthusiastically into his new life as a budding professional.

After her disillusion with Siphwe, Zodwa was ready to give up her dream of becoming a doctor's wife, and go back to her true love. She wrote him a note letting him know that they could resume their love affair. Patrick wrote back telling Zodwa that he had met and

most fortunately fallen in love for the second time in his life, with a young woman who was also studying to become a math and science teacher. He planned to marry her.

Zodwa did not believe that Patrick was no longer in love with her. She thought if she waited long enough he would change his mind. But Patrick married some years later and his wife gave birth to a baby girl. Even then, Zodwa did not give up hope, she was convinced that her Patrick would come back to her. She stopped working at the clinic, and thought all day about how she would receive her beloved when he finally realised that they were meant to be together. Zodwa's parents worried that their child was losing her mind. They tried to talk to her, they asked her aunts, and female cousins to talk to her. Zodwa's friends told her to forget Patrick and move on. But Zodwa believed they didn't know Patrick the way she did, and they did not know the pain in her heart.

Zodwa's mother had heard that MaZungu, the healer could cure any ailment, even ailments of the heart. She was desperate to lift the fog that had descended on her only child's life. She asked that Zodwa be healed, and the pain in her heart be removed. MaZungu let Zodwa's mother know that it was not easy to take away pain in the heart, and to administer the treatment that ensures that a young woman gives up on the love of her life. MaZungu agreed to heal Zodwa. Her mother said a silent prayer, and handed her only child to the healer.

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love songs for nheti and other tales by NOKUTHULA MAZIBUKO

*For years to come those who knew about Zodwa and Patrick's tragic love sang praises about how MaZungu the able healer cured her. Zodwa was later able to fall in love and marry a teacher, who bore a striking resemblance to her first love Patrick.*

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## **5. happy xmas!**

The sun was up a few minutes early this Christmas morning. MaShezi could see it through her bedroom window and it did not please her one bit. It was only minutes after five and it was threatening to be a scorching December 25. Like the day before when those naughty children of MaNdaba next door wasted buckets of water pouring it on themselves, and all over the bloody place.

MaShezi hated hot Christmases, everybody used them as an excuse to drink copious amounts of alcohol saying they needed to cool off, and then when late afternoon came, there were always two or three bleeding bodies in the street. Victims of nice times, and the frenzy of celebrating the birth of the holy infant.

She knew her son Veli, the only one of her five children still living with her, would be up when the sun was blazing and go about his daily drinking routine. On ordinary days, Veli's routine would include looking for piece jobs and then drinking all the money as soon as he had made it. Everyday it was the same – get up after ten – do a little gardening here, fixing something there – when he had collected enough money, he would pour it down his bloody throat. And then return home singing, swearing or sobbing depending on his mood.

Veli was the last of her children, and MaShezi had put all her energies into raising him. Unlike her other children, he never went to bed hungry, never went without books or

school fees. He was her treasure and she was sure he would make her proud one day by becoming a teacher, or a traffic inspector or even a doctor. But instead he had reached thirty years, and the only thing he had accomplished was being able to hold his liquor well.

MaShezi often cursed the day when she came to this city of gold. It was more than fifty years ago, that she arrived in this township South West of where her husband was working, cleaning the roads of the city. She was a young bride then, and she did not want the loose women of the city to devour her husband. Bab'Shezi was a strong handsome man, who had an eye for the fairer sex. When he said it was time to leave the village, and the sea and go to eGoli to earn paper money, MaShezi promptly packed her things and refused to be left behind.

Bab'Shezi tried to discourage her saying she should stay behind like the other women, look after their fields, and make sure that the children are well looked after. He promised to send money every month for school fees, sugar and whatever else they may need. But MaShezi's mind was made up, no man of hers was going to run around with the loose women of Johannesburg, if Shezi was going to the city, then so was she.

They arrived in the city and joined hundreds of squatters in a township called Pimville. Bab'Shezi managed to pay a few council people to get the right papers, and to be first in line for a brick house.

It is here in her brick house that MaShezi has lived since she arrived in the city 50 years ago. Here where she gave birth to eight children, only five of whom are alive. Here where she started selling oranges, sweets and loose cigarettes to make sure that her children had food to eat. Here where she lived for many years with Bab'Shezi, until he succumbed to the sore that was eating his throat. In this brick house where she continued living after laying her husband to rest. MaShezi often thought of leaving the township and going back to her village, and the sea - but she never did manage to leave. And besides, all her children lived in the township, and she would miss her grandchildren.

Her grandchildren was the thought that got MaShezi out of bed. They would be arriving soon to visit her, so she had to finish cooking, put on her bright red dress and attend a quick hour of Christmas mass, before coming to sit on her stoep or with MaNdaba and wait for them. She did not have much cooking to do, she would finish it within an hour and then rush off to mass. She had already baked the cakes, made the dumpling, chicken, potatoes, beetroot and ginger the day before. All that was left was to prepare some cabbage, carrots, peas and bean salad, and the sweet jelly and custard for the little ones. Even though she had 75 years she was still able to do a lot of things around the house.

Hopefully by the time she came back from mass, Veli would still be sleeping and she would convince him to rather stay at home, instead of scouring the streets for liquor to quench his thirst. She did not want the drama of previous Christmases when Veli would leave the festivities at the house and go from street to street wishing them happy Christmas, and come home either singing, swearing or sobbing.

MaShezi looked forward to seeing her daughters Thoko and Nkanyezi , and Themba and Mongezi, her other two sons - they would all arrive with their children. Nkanyezi, who worked as a hair dresser, had four sons, and she lived not very far from MaShezi with her husband Mandla. Nkanyezi's sons, the youngest was five and the eldest eleven, often visited her after school, ran and screamed all over the yard causing her to remember severe curses. Thoko had one sweet daughter of only three years. MaShezi's other two sons Themba and Mongezi had married beautiful wives, who really were not too bad for women raised in the city. They were full of respect, and she had not heard any nasty gossip about them drinking alcohol, or talking back to their husbands.

After mass, MaShezi arrived home to find Veli already gone. He knew she would try to stop him from going drinking, so he slipped out before his mother's return.

MaShezi decided to keep her bright red dress which she had won during mass on. She usually changed immediately after mass into her home clothes but being Christmas, she decided to keep on her special dress for the rest of the day.

MaNdaba next door was still preparing her food, so MaShezi went across to help, She would be able to see her children and grandchildren arrive.

As she stepped outside her kitchen door, she noticed that the sky was clear and blue. It was not going to rain today. It was not going to rain and stop the drunk people from stabbing each other. MaShezi's heart was not very happy, already the Christmas festivities accompanied by loud music and laughing, had started. She thought of Veli, she had prayed for her son that morning. Prayed that God should see him through another Christmas.

MaNdaba's grandchildren were at it again, pouring water all over the bloody place, if her walking stick was long enough she would stretch out and hit their big heads straight for wasting so much water.

MaShezi enjoyed helping MaNdaba prepare her food. Although she only had 50 years MaNdaba was wise beyond her years because she knew all the township's gossip. She knew all about MaZondi who was as thin as a broom stick and never worked a day in her life because she claimed she was sick all the time, but come Thursday she was never too sick to go and bet the horses. She knew all about MaThabethe who everyone suspected of witchcraft because she was very dark, and lived alone with eighteen cats. MaNdaba said she had proof of how these cats could bring misery upon MaThabethe's enemies. So the two friends were careful not to say too many bad things against MaThabethe...

Thoko and her sweet girl were the first to arrive just before mid-day. The others followed soon after. They were disappointed that Veli was determined to spend another drunken Christmas in the street. But were nonetheless able to enjoy their mother's food and have a happy Christmas in the house where they grew up. The house where their father had lived and died.

It was a good Christmas, even though there was no rain. There was no rain to rain hard and discourage the drunk people from stabbing each other.

All of MaShezi's grandchildren, had so much fun, they managed to ruin their good Christmas clothes. Nkanyezi's boys, played with water with those dreadful Ndaba

children. And Thoko's sweet little girl entertained everyone with her dancing and singing.

The day was scorching and no rain came. The neighbours and everyone in the street ate, and had a good time, no screams were heard, and hopefully no one was freshly widowed. It was only when the sun set, and MaShezi's children and grandchildren were leaving that they began to ask about Veli. He still was not back. He did not come back until late that night. He came back sobbing. He entered the house noisily as he stumbled across the kitchen table and chairs. MaShezi's old eyes looked on the bloody shirt worn by her last born. She looked on with sadness and defeat. Her last born continued to sob and to swear as he rinsed the red knife in the kitchen sink, muttering about being willing to kill any bastard who messed with his woman. MaShezi went to her bedroom and wished that it had rained that day. Maybe then her last born would have stayed at home that Christmas day.

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## **6. pretty lady**

Staff nurse Nozuko is the prettiest mother in our street. She has big afro hair, is tall and slim, and wears colorful silk scarves and bright red lipstick. When I grow up I want to be just like her. My mother says if I want to be like staff nurse Nozuko I will have to stop bunking school and study until I'm old. She says because I'm seven, I still have many years of going to school before I can become as educated as staff nurse Nozuko. I wish my class teacher, MaNdaba would stop giving us lashes for every little thing, then I would not have to pretend to be sick just so my grandmother will let me stay at home. My mother is a teacher, and she says people in the street will gossip about the teacher's child who does not want to set foot in a classroom. She says "Nheti do you know how embarrassed I feel as a lady-teacher to have a child who is afraid of school?!" Well she embarrasses me too because she does not dress as beautifully as staff nurse Nozuko, who is sometimes at home during the day after working night duty at the hospital, and cooks curried potatoes for me and my friend Zaza.

Zaza is already seven, and she and her brother Mandla are staff nurse Nozuko's only two children, and so they get everything they want. They get toys, books and very nice clothes. My mother says I must not compare myself to Zaza because we are not the Joneses and I have four older brothers, and we all have to share. I don't know who these Joneses are but my mother knows them and says they are extremely rich. Not like us, who must count all our pennies. My father is also a teacher, and my mother complains

that the government's pay is peanuts. She says she can't believe it's 1975 and the racist NP government is still in power, and they are really messing up education. She says when they came into power in 1948 everyone thought the liberation movements would fight and defeat them in no time. But they have killed, arrested, and chased out of South Africa many people fighting for the rights of black people to freedom, education, and a good life. My father says now the racist NP government wants the children at their school to start learning all subjects in Afrikaans. My father speaks Afrikaans very well, but says this law that students must learn everything in "the language of the oppressor" is stupid, students already struggle with English because it is not their mother language, and now the racist NP wants them to learn mathematics, science and probably English in Afrikaans which is a THIRD language. He says the students are extremely angry about this, and it is the duty of the parents especially the teachers to support the students when they protest against being taught in Afrikaans.

It is Sunday and Zaza and I are walking back from church. We go to a Catholic church, so mass is only one hour long. This is good because we are back home by ten, and can play diketo, or skipping much longer than our friends who go to Zion and have to stay in church all Sunday long! It is December and hot, so Zaza and I wear our matching sandals and church dresses, we are kicking stones as we walk. Our mothers say this is a very uncivilised habit for girls, so we don't kick stones when we see staff nurse Nozuko or my mother coming. Zaza says she does not like being at her house because her father beats up her mother.

She says her mother has to put on a lot of make up and bright red lipstick and big goggles to hide her face when her father has beaten her mother. Sometimes staff nurse Nozuko runs to our house screaming in the middle of the night, running away from Mr. Sithole, Zaza's father. She screams that my parents should call the police, but my father says the police are government dogs who will do nothing to help.

When staff nurse Nozuko and my mother drink tea on Sundays, I overhear my mother whispering that staff nurse Nozuko should leave Mr. Sithole and move back to the eastern Cape to live with her parents. Staff nurse Nozuko is afraid that Mr. Sithole will follow her there and kill her. My mother says Mr. Sithole will kill staff nurse Nozuko if she continues to stay with him. Staff nurse Nozuko tells my mother that she loves Mr. Sithole and cannot leave him. And besides she is not the only woman in our street who is getting beaten up. MaDlamini's husband also hits her, and so does MaNgcobo's. Some men just have bad tempers, and the only thing that women who are married to them must do, is try not to make them angry. My mother gets angry with staff nurse Nozuko, and tells her that she was not born to be any man's punching bag, and she should leave immediately. But staff nurse Nozuko is in love and she will stay.

Zaza and I don't want to get married when we grow up, just in case we marry men with bad tempers like Mr. Sithole, Mr. Dlamini, and Mr. Ngcobo. As we walk back from church and kick stones, Zaza says she has got a plan to get her mother away from her father. Zaza always comes up with good plans, she decides all the time what games we should play and how we should play them. She says she plans to run away to her grandmother in the eastern Cape, that way her mother and her brother Mandla will be

forced to follow her and get away from her father who is a bully. I think this is a very good plan. But there is one problem, the eastern Cape is very, very far, and I'm not sure that Zaza can get there by herself. When I tell Zaza this, she gets angry and starts to cry. She says I'm messing up her plan, and now she will have to stay in the house with her bully father who hurts her beautiful mother. I'm sorry that I've made my friend cry, so I say sorry and say I will give her some of the money for her train ride to the eastern Cape. Zaza says it takes all day and all night to get to the eastern Cape. She says the last time she was there she paid careful attention so she could see how to get to her grandmother's place in the township from the train station in town. For a year, she has been stealing money from her mother's purse, saving up for the train fare. I have some cents saved from money that my parents and my grandmother have given me. It is in a sock under the bed I share with my grandmother.

This morning Zaza told me that she now has enough money to go, so she will travel next Saturday. She says it is nicer to travel by train on the weekends because the church people sing right through the night, and she will not get bored. So if she leaves on Saturday morning, she will arrive in the eastern Cape on Sunday morning, and then catch a taxi to her Makhulu's house. I am very sad that Zaza is planning to leave, she is my best friend, and I am going to really really miss her. But I do not want staff nurse Nozuko to be beaten up by Mr. Sithole so I tell Zaza that her plan is very good, and that she must go next Saturday. Zaza and I play a good game of skipping, happy with our plan to rescue the beautiful staff nurse Nozuko from Mr. Sithole.

We play until Mama calls us to come and fetch our lunch. We sit on the grass under the peach tree enjoying the rice, chicken potatoes and pumpkin. At night I can hear staff nurse Nozuko's screams under my blanket. I pray for next Saturday to come quickly so that Zaza and her mother can go and live in the eastern Cape.

On Wednesday Zaza and I walk to her house hoping to eat curried potatoes made by Zaza's mother. When we get to Zaza's house the door is locked. We knock and knock but Zaza's mother does not open, and the door is locked. We decide to climb on the dust bin and look through the window to see if maybe staff nurse Nozuko is sleeping. We see Zaza's mother lying full of blood on the kitchen table. There is blood everywhere, on the walls on the stove, on the floor, everywhere. We can't see her face because it is covered in blood. We run to tell my grandmother who tells the other neighbors.

The police come to take staff nurse Nozuko's body. Mr. Sithole has run away, his employers at the offices where he works as a clerk in town, say they had fired him that day because he was a lazy kaffir who disappeared forever when they sent him. MaDlamini says she saw Mr. Sithole arriving early from work, and then she heard staff nurse Nozuko screaming and screaming in pain. When the screaming stopped she thought Mr. Sithole had gotten tired, and things were back to normal.

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*It is a bright summer Saturday, and my best friend Zaza and her beautiful mother staff nurse Nozuko, are leaving for the eastern Cape. They are dressed in bright summer*

*dresses and full of smiles. They wave to everyone in the streets. Staff nurse Nozuko is leaving Mr. Sithole, she has found a job in a hospital near where Zaza's Makhulu lives. They are going to live not far from the sea. Zaza says I must come and visit her and her mother, her Makhulu and her cousins in the eastern Cape. I have never seen staff nurse Nozuko so happy. She looks more beautiful than ever. My mother is crying because she will miss her friend. I am excited because next December I will visit Zaza and the beautiful mother, staff nurse Nozuko by the sea!*

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## **7. nkgono**

for Nkgono Mapoti, Kokwana, and Gogo Ntipane

The saddest day of Nheti's life, was the day her Nkgono died. Nheti's grandmother, Nkgono, had lived with her family ever since Nheti was born, and ever since Nheti's four elder brothers were born. After her friend Zaza moved to go and live far away, Nkgono became Nheti's closest friend. Closer than her two friends Sonto and Busi.

Nheti's life with Nkgono was blissful. Every morning, Nkgono gently coaxed her granddaughter out of sleep, washed and dressed her, and walked her up the road to school. Nheti did not like school much, and held Nkgono's hand tight as they approached the school gate. After school, Nheti rushed home to play cards with Nkgono and listen to her many stories about far away places. Nkgono and Nheti loved each other deeply, and spent as much time as possible together. In summer, Nheti liked to help Nkgono pick round ripe peaches, peel them and can them. She also liked to help Nkgono bake big scones that they ate hot, with jam and tea.

When winter came, and Nkgono fell very ill with a cold that became pneumonia, Nheti's father took Nkgono to the hospital, where she slipped away at night and joined her ancestors.

Although her mother explained that Nkgono had gone to heaven, where the angels were looking after her, Nheti's heart was sore and she could not stop crying. She wanted Nkgono to wake her up in the morning and walk her to school. She wanted Nkgono to hug her tight and kiss her cheeks.

After Nkgono's death, Nheti's life became hard. At school, two girls in her class started to bully her, demanding money and food. When Nheti first refused, the one girl, the big fat one hit her face hard and took her bread and jam anyway. After that, she dreaded lunchtime, when the two bullies would push her, and take her money and food. Nheti did not know what to do. Zaza was not there to come up with clever plans of how they should deal with the bullies, Nheti was too scared to tell the teacher, and Nkgono was not there to pinch the bullies' ears.

Nheti often rushed home in tears, dreading the next day when she would have to go back to school and face her tormentors.

That is until she had a dream about Nkgono. In the dream, Nkgono smiled at Nheti and hugged her tight. She then sat her on her lap, and told her a story about how Hare triumphed over the nasty Hyena.

Nkgono said long long ago, in a place far far away Hare and Lion were very good friends. They enjoyed each other's company greatly. Lion would laugh for hours at Hare's jokes. Hare told the funniest jokes in the whole jungle. He told jokes about why Owl had

such very big eyes. Saying it was because he got a fright one day when it thundered, his eyes popped open, and stayed forever large and frightened.

Hare said the reason Tortoise moved around with his house is because he was too dumb to realise he didn't have to. And Lion's personal favourite was why Skunk smelled so bad? It was because long ago he was very lazy to wash, and so the other animals cast a spell on Skunk and made him smell bad. He wanted to get rid of the smell, but never could! Hare enjoyed seeing his friend Lion laugh and laugh at his jokes. And more importantly Hare liked having the strongest animal in the jungle as his friend. It meant he did not have to be scared of anyone. No one bothered him because they feared Lion's roar, and Lion's strength.

But one-day Lion had to visit his relatives far far away. He promised his friend Hare that he would be back soon, and they would have fun together. Hare was sad to see his friend go, but was comforted that he would not be gone for long. As soon as Lion waved goodbye to Hare, sly nasty Hyena, and his two nasty friends came to terrorise Hare. They were mean bullies who had nothing better to do than to take advantage of the opportunity to bully Hare now that his friend Lion was not around. They took all of Hare's food, and threatened to beat him up. Hare was so frightened, he could not sleep at night. He did not know how he would be able to survive until his friend Lion came back. He did not look forward to more visits from Hyena and his nasty pack. What would he do? If he ran away, Hyena and his pack might find him, and when Lion came back he would struggle to find him. Hare thought and thought what he could do, and finally the idea hit him!!! During their long afternoons of fun and jokes, one of the things Lion had taught him was

to roar! This was a great trick he had learnt because he and Lion played tricks on the other animals, pretending to be a pride of Lions, roaring and scaring the Zebras at the river. This was a favourite trick of theirs, they would hide behind the bushes and roar!

When Hyena and friends came to take Hare's food, Hare hid behind a bush and roared as loud as he could. The Hyenas got the fright of their lives thinking big strong Lion was back, and they slinked into the jungle as fast as they could. From then until his friend Lion came back, Hare lived peacefully, and enjoyed himself lying in the sun.

When Nheti woke up, she knew exactly how to handle the bullies. When they asked for her lunch, she thought of Nkgono, looked straight at the bullies and shouted at the top of her voice “If you TOUCH my food, I will BITE you so HARD you will BLEED FOREVERRRRR!!!” This took the bullies by surprise, and they were not quite sure what to do. Nheti looked very serious, and very frightening. The bullies did not want to take chances, just in case Nheti really could bite and make someone bleed forever. So the bullies decided they were getting tired of Nheti's jam sandwiches anyway, and they went off to find an easier victim.

Nheti's life became good again, and her Nkgono came to visit her often in her dreams.

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## **8. ghost!!!!**

This story is set in a small rural town in South Africa. A place where black and white live in close proximity.

The town's people, who are very superstitious, have believed for many years that the place is haunted.

They say that every year the August winds awaken a malicious spirit which destroys their crops and frightens even the bravest among them. Many people claim to have seen the ghost, they say it appears usually just after sunset. It comes with a gush of wind and gets swept up into the sky. The ghost has many colors, sometimes it is a blue "thing". Other times it is red, or green, or white. Some people say there is more than one ghost!!!

So during the windy season, as soon as the sun begins to set, the town quickly disappears off the street. People rush through whatever business they have left, and flee into their homes; determined to avoid the wrath of the ghost.

There are many stories about who exactly the spirit used to be, each one slightly more ridiculous than the last. Among the whites the most popular story is that the ghost used to be an alcoholic farm worker who one day drank too much, fell into a well and drowned. They say the blacks must exorcise the ghost because "it is one of them". And among the blacks one of the stories goes: the ghost used to be the mistress of one of the farmers, who when the farmer ended the affair killed herself because of a broken heart. They say the whites must get rid of the mean spirit, because it is "one of them".

Finally the town's priest suggests that they come together and chase the ghost away. Out of desperation the town's people agree. They agree to all wait for the ghost at sunset, and when it appears, pray as hard as possible so that the spirit can leave in peace.

On the first day, everyone, except the priest chickens out. They hide in their houses, when the priest sees he's the only one there, he gets a fright and runs.

On the second day, they are a little braver, the town's people come out at sunset, and wait, but as soon as the gush of wind starts, they run away and hide behind their doors.

On the third day they decide enough is enough, it's either them, or the ghost! The sun sets, and everyone waits. Hands clutched to their chests, and eyes looking up at the heavens. The gush of wind arrives, no one moves. They stand their ground. Their eyes are fixed to the heavens, they are too scared to look straight ahead, at the ghost. When suddenly someone bursts out laughing. The person laughs and laughs and points at "something". One by one everyone cautiously looks at what he's pointing at, one by one, they start to laugh.

What they see is lots and lots of plastic debris, in many different colors: blue green, yellow, purple. Bits of plastic, swept up by the August winds. The "ghost" that the town has been so afraid of, is actually bits of litter! HA! HA! HA!

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**9. 5 am!**

Malome Sunshines' stomach was really in trouble. He could not sleep all night, he had to go and relieve himself every half-hour or so. He must have eaten something bad, because he was suffering from chronic diarrhea. His girlfriend Daisy, with whom he was visiting his sister in Soweto, had tried to feed him dry bread in the hope of lessening the diarrhea. But the bread only made his stomach cramp painfully, and did nothing to reduce the diarrhea. So all night, he ran to the outside toilet.

By five in the morning Malome Sunshine was exhausted. He could hardly keep his eyes open as he sat on the toilet seat. Being winter, it was still dark, and the birds were still fast asleep.

Malome Sunshine's heart nearly stopped when the door suddenly flew open, and three white men shone torches in his face “Put your hands in the air!!! You're under arrest!!! Kom jong!!! We don't have time to waist!!” Malome Sunshine's mind raced through all the petty crimes he had committed lately. But they all had happened in Alex, about 80 kilometers away. How did the police track him down? No one was supposed to know where he was? As usual he and Daisy had left one morning without telling the other shack dwellers where they were going. They just said they would be back soon. Which could mean anything from a day to weeks.

“I need to pull my pants up.” Malome Sunshine's face was frozen, suddenly realising just how cold the morning was.

“Hurry up and get out of the toilet!!! We don't have all day!!!” the men barked.

They had come especially early on a Sunday to catch these political types. Catch them unawares, and drag them to prison where they belong!!!

When Malome Sunshine came out of the toilet, he saw more than three policemen. There must have been about ten of them, who had sneaked in quietly to surprise him on this cold winter morning. The policemen quickly handcuffed him,

“Mr. Isaac, Bheki Langa you are under arrest for plotting to overthrow the state, and for teaching your students at Buhle High school to carry out acts of terrorism against the state!!!!”

Malome Sunshine could not believe his ears, Isaac Langa was his brother in law, his sister's husband. “this is a big mistake...”

“It is a bloody big mistake!! trying to overthrow the state!!!” The tall bearded policeman who was doing the talking seemed to be the one in charge.

“I am not Isaac Langa...” tried Malome Sunshine.

“The hell you aren't! Where's your pass!!” shouted the policeman.

Malome Sunshine did not own the dreaded id document “ I don't have one...”

“Mr. Langa don't waist our time let's go!!”

The policeman did not give Malome Sunshine a chance to explain that his brother in law Isaac Langa, was out of town at a teachers' conference. The men grabbed and pulled him. By now his sister, mother, and niece were up.

“What's going on!!! Where are you taking my brother!! Leave him alone you dirty dogs!!!” Malome Sunshine's sister was screaming and starting to cry.

The policemen ignored her screams and threw him into the van full of other unfortunate offenders. And sped off in search of more victims.

Later in the day Malome Sunshine's sister arrived to see him at the prison. She tried to explain that her brother was not Isaac Langa. That Isaac Langa was her husband who was out of town at a teachers' conference, he would only be back the following day. The prison officials, said if she was telling the truth, she should come back with the real Mr. Langa and that he should bring his pass.

The next day Bab'Langa accompanied his wife to the prison ready to get arrested for what was termed "terrorist activities". The school where he taught, often got visits from government officials who were accusing the teachers of sabotaging their plans to implement the Afrikaans language policy for all schools. They said the teachers were teaching the children to refuse to be taught in Afrikaans and to leave the country and join liberation armies bent on toppling the state.

At the prison, Mr. Langa, showed the officials his passbook, and was promptly arrested. The officials however refused to release Malome Sunshine, saying they were holding him for associating with terrorists.

Malome Sunshine and Mr. Langa spent a whole year in jail awaiting trial. They were finally released because there was no proof to back up the accusations. And they had to make space in the jail for new victims arrested on flimsy charges.

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## **10. the feast**

The end of year celebrations at Nheti's Catholic primary school, was what every pupil and teacher looked forward to. This is when those who had worked hard during the year

got rewarded with various prizes, and the lazy ones who had not, were relieved that finally they would enjoy two long months of summer holidays.

Prizes were given to scholars for getting the highest marks, for being the hardest working, the neatest, the most athletic, there was even a prize for the friendliest student. Teachers were recognised for mainly being hard working and diligent. The prizes were not that remarkable, they were mainly second hand books, and music records that were donated to the nuns and brothers who were part of the teaching staff. But the small prizes still pleased the recipients who welcomed their moment of glory when they had to walk up to the principal Brother Peter, shake his hand and receive the prize.

The celebrations were all day, and entertainment in the form of short plays, music and dance items was provided by pupils and some teachers. The quality of the shows ranged from the very bad, like when budding actors got stage fright and cried or peed in front of their expectant audience; to the very good choir performances by the older scholars.

Apart from waiting to see who got what prize, the highlight of the celebrations was the elaborate lunch of stew and rice cooked by the fat and jolly canteen manager Sis' Sarah. For the year-end occasion, Sis' Sarah was given a budget to serve more than the usual fat cakes and potatoes. She went to town cooking her famous stew and rice, which everyone washed down with Sis' Sarah's home made ginger ale.

Sis' Sarah always looked forward to once again proving that she was the best cook around by feeding the school her famous stew. She served every one with a happy smile and

wished them all happy holidays. Everyone, except MaThabethe. MaThabethe who always came with her eighteen cats. As soon as Sis'Sarah heard the creepy miaows of MaThabethe's feline companions, her face wrinkled into a frown. She would quickly dish for the strange woman who many suspected could cast all sorts of spells on her enemies, and those she wanted to play mischief on. Sis'Sarah did not understand why MaThabethe had to attend the year-end celebrations because she was not a teacher at the school, and she was not a parent to any of the pupils because she didn't have any children. But Sis'Sarah could not chase MaThabethe away because everyone at the school, found the sight of MaThabethe surrounded by her multi coloured cats, quite entertaining. She was like an ongoing fringe show, all day. The children played with her cats and gave them sips of ginger ale. And because there was no proof that she really could cast a spell, the nuns and brothers did not feel she presented a threat to their belief system and so welcomed her at the school.

At this year's celebrations, MaThabethe decided to entertain herself. When she got to the front of the queue where Sis'Sarah was dishing her famous stew, MaThabethe looked straight at the frowning Sis'Sarah, gave her a smile, blinked three times and made Sis'Sarah's dishing spoon and stew vanish! Sis'Sarah stared open mouthed at her empty

hand, and the empty pot. The witch had done it! She had cast a spell and made her precious stew vanish!! When Sis'Sarah had recovered some of her senses, she screamed at the top of her voice " I knew it! I knew it! She's a witch with all her millions of cats!!! Come and see!!!!" When everyone heard Sis'Sarah's shrill voice, they rushed to the front of the queue to at last witness MaThabethe's spectacular magic. "Come and see!! She has made my delicious stew vanish!!! Jealousy! All because of jealousy!!! My stew is gone!!!!Witch!!!"

Some of the children climbed onto the canteen counter to see if Sis'Sarah's stew had really vanished. The brothers and nuns, although believing that none other than the Lord and Savior could make things vanish, also peered into the pot just to make sure. Suddenly everyone giggled. Sis'Sarah was confused, why was everyone finding the tragic disappearance of her precious stew so funny? Some of the kids were giggling and saying Sis'Sarah was losing her mind because her stew was still in the pot. When Sis'Sarah looked inside the pot, her stew had mysteriously reappeared.

"She's a witch! She's made it appear again!" The children were in stitches laughing at Sis'Sarah's strange outburst. MaThabethe smiled sweetly and swiftly walked away with her plate of stew, leaving Sis'Sarah waving and raving.

The brothers and nuns prayed for Sis'Sarah, and took her home for the rest of the day saying all the cooking had made her delirious with exhaustion. She was even hallucinating, imagining disappearing stews. But all the time Sis'Sarah was convinced that the witch MaThabethe had temporarily made her stew, and dishing spoon disappear.

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## **11. mama's recipes**

Nheti's mother, MaLanga, was determined to teach all her children to cook. Unlike most of her friends, she did not subscribe to the doctrine that boys did not need to learn to cook because they would bring a makoti home who would do all the housework and cooking.

She tried to instill a rather strict mental and manual labour balance in all her children. She felt it was undignified to have someone else do unpaid menial labour for you, so in the advent that one could not afford to pay a cook a cleaner, then one had to have those skills. Besides, cooking was such a joy, she felt it would certainly enrich the lives and minds of her children to learn a few culinary delights. So with great enthusiasm and zest she declared the holiday month of December Cooking month! She announced her plan as soon as all her children were on summer break, “Thami! Sizwe! Phila! Nheti! Wozani lapha banta bam! Great holiday plans are cooking in the kitchen!”

When Nheti and her four elder brothers had gathered at the kitchen table MaLanga unveiled her plan, she was going to teach them how to cook all their favourite recipes. “Ma, why do we have to learn to cook, your cooking is just fine.” Thami at fourteen had better things to do than hang around the kitchen with his mother and siblings.

Sizwe, two years younger, agreed “Ja Ma, why should we learn to besides, boys don't cook, they do the garden.”

“...and me. I do the garden. I help you guys cut the grass, and remove weeds.” Nheti countered.

“Exactly. If Nheti, can work in then garden, you can cook! Besides there's no such thing about boys this and girls that. We all have to eat, so we all can cook!” MaLanga, had no patience for impractical ideas, everyone had to pick up as many life skills as a possible. And cooking was definitely such a skill!

“Today we are starting with something quite simple we start with pap and chakalaka!!!” MaLanga had all the ingredients ready on a counter.

“Pap and chakalaka! And we eat what we have cooked ne mawe!” Ten year old Phila liked eating, and sometimes hung around the kitchen as his mother was cooking, just to

make sure he got the food piping hot, and not a minute later than necessary. He was secretly pleased that his mother was teaching them to cook. That way he wouldn't have to rely entirely on her for his favourite dishes. He hoped she would teach them to make curried potatoes, and dumpling. His eyes twinkled, and mouth watered just thinking about it.

“OK, first we make the stiff pap, that's the stiff maize porridge. I've got boiling water in the pot, and I half a teaspoon of salt in the water, and about a cup of maize. And stir firmly, but carefully to make sure there are no lumps...” MaLanga explained the recipe with ease and enjoyment, she was a teacher, and loved teaching something new.

“Mama, can I stir please?” Nheti loved learning something new and was eager to get cooking.

MaLanga smiled at her youngest, and gently explained “My angel, you and Phila are still too young to actually handle the pots. You must watch, and then when you are older, I will supervise you whilst you cook.”

Phila couldn't hide his disappointment, he was looking forward to whipping together his own gourmet meals.

Sizwe was pleased there was something he was old enough to do, “Ma, I'll stir the pot.” He offered firmly.

“Ok. Hold the wooden spoon firmly in your hand Sizwe. Be careful, not to get burnt”

When Sizwe was satisfied that his pap had no more lumps, MaLanga covered the pot and allowed it to simmer for about ten minutes.

“OK, whilst we are waiting for the pap to cook a bit, we can prepare our chakalaka.

Thami you can help me to peel and grate three carrots.”MaLanga handed the reluctant

Thami the peeler, and started quickly and efficiently peeling and grating the carrots.

When she finished she diced one medium sized carrot, and cut 2 chillies. She opened a tin of baked beans and had it ready on the side, as well as a cup of vegetable stock.

“OK now we fry the onions and chillie in about three spoons of sunflower oil. And we season with a pinch of salt a two spoons of curry powder. And now the onions are golden brown, we add the cup of vegetable stock, and the grated carrots and we cook for about fifteen. Minutes”

“Mmh, Mama it smells delicious!”Nheti was enthralled by her mother's speed at turning boring old carrots into a delicious chakalaka gravy.

“What about the stiff pap” Thami asked after glowing at being appointed assistant chef.

“OK, Thama add another half a cup of maize meal to the pap, stir it properly, making sure there are no lumps, and cover it, and let the pap simmer for fifteen minutes”MaLanga explained patiently.

“And then will the food be ready?”Phila's stomach was starting to rumble.

After fifteen minutes MaLanga added the tin of baked beans to the chakalaka gravy, and dished five delicious plates of chakalaka and pap for herself and her hungry children.

They sat down to eat a delicious lunch, and had to remember to leave some for their father Bab'Langa who was out visiting friends.

On subsequent days MaLanga, had an enthralled audience of future chefs watching and helping her prepare different dishes. Nheti, whose memory was quite sharp for a seven year old, impressed her friends Sonto and Busi with all the recipes her mother was teaching her and her siblings:

*To make mngqusho – soak two cups of samp and one cup of butter beans over night. Then boil samp and beans in two litres of water for three hours, add a teaspoon of salt, a quarter cup of vegetable stock and one diced onion. When mngqusho is ready add two spoons of butter.*

*To make morogo (spinach) – finely cut two bunches of spinach, and peel and dice two potatoes. Boil together with onion chopped onion, season with salt and pepper. When ingredients are soft add, a spoon of peanut butter. Serves four people*

*To make cabbage – finely cut cabbage, fry in four spoons of sunflower oil. Add one onion and season with salt and pepper. Serves eight people.*

*To make matebelekwane (dumpling) – Sift and mix three cups of flower with a teaspoon of dry yeast a spoon of sugar an a teaspoon of salt. Make a well in the middle of the dry ingredients, add half a cup of warm water. Mix until dough is elastic, ad more warm water if necessary. Put dough in a greased steal bowl. Cover and leave dough standing for an hour. Steam dough in a covered pot for two hours. Serves eight people.*

*To make gemere (ginger beer) – boil three large spoons of ginger powder in two liters of water. Add one pineapple, and a cup of sugar, boil for another hour. Add a liter of orange juice. Chill in fridge over night.*

*To make honey scones – Mix a cup of flour, a teaspoon of baking powder, three spoons of sugar, a spoon of butter, three spoons of honey and half a cup of milk. Bake for ten minute at 210 degrees.*

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## **12. flowers**

She knew the place at the foot of the hill very well. A place so beautiful, she thought it existed only in her dreams. She saw bright pink roses, deep orange sunflowers, jasmine, lavender, daisies and chamomile. In the morning, she could still smell and taste the sweet scents. Palesa had many times dreamt of the village where flowers and love awaited her.

She dreamt of it as a girl, and later as a young woman. She kept dreaming, until one day she woke up knowing that she would catch the train that would deliver her to the place where colour knew no bounds.

Zenzo was waiting for her. He waited patiently for many years. Until she arrived with the rising sun. Their meeting was easy, as they had met before in dreams and prepared for their big wedding. They married on a warm and blessed summer's day. Their wedding feast was remembered for years to come.

Palesa knew how to make soothing fragrant water using the abundant flowers in their homestead. Palesa's flower water cured all kinds of mental, spiritual and physical ailments. If someone was suffering from a broken heart, which made them feel depressed and resulted in all kinds of ailments, from headaches to stomach aches, she would simply take the petals of ten roses, and put them in five liters of rain water. She would leave the mixture in the sun for three days, and then give it to the patient with instructions that they put a little bit in their hot bath water everyday. Whilst sitting in the steaming rose water, the patient was to pray to the Creator, and ask that his or her heart be cured. Three weeks of the rose water treatment and intense prayer would mend a severely broken heart.

Palesa also advised her patients to fast whilst going through the rose water treatment, a diet of a little bit fresh fruit and vegetables, ensured faster healing.

People from all over the village came to Palesa for treatment. Some had mental disorders which caused them to be very nervous and agitated. For them, she mixed lavender, chamomile and jasmine. Jasmine was also good for those who had a problem

experiencing joy – bathing in jasmine immediately lifted their spirits. And for the lazy ones, who had troubles getting up early to work their fields, she prepared sunflower water. Sunflowers released potent sun energy which infused the patient with instant verve and a strong desire to work and generally be active.

Palesa was happy to be making healing waters that could cure many ailments. The times they were living in were hard, and many people suffered from many sicknesses. There were many wars and diseases. People couldn't care less about each other, they were more concerned with getting for themselves, and they often did not care who they trampled on to get what they wanted. Lovers turned against each other, and so did brothers and sisters. Families and friends ended their connections and focused on getting and sometimes stealing material riches. All this lovelessness is what caused many people to get sick. There were also the really serious ailments of those whose hearts were full of hatred and greed, and therefore harmed others. Those with very dark hearts killed and maimed others.

Zenzo and Palesa worked very hard to plant and harvest the flowers to make the healing waters. Zenzo's mother and father helped the young couple plant, grow and harvest flowers. They were very happy to have a beautiful and kind daughter-in-law, who had the skill to make healing flower waters. They did not mind that she had somehow forgotten who her people were, and where she had come from. They loved and cared for Palesa as they did for their own son Zenzo. Zenzo even felt they spoiled his wife a bit, like when his mother brought Palesa tea with lots of honey on cold winter mornings and tried to coax her gently out of bed. Palesa countered Zenzo's claims that his parents spoiled her by

returning the favour and preparing cool ginger ale for her parents in law to enjoy during late summer afternoons chats under a peach tree. The love Palesa shared with her new family gave her the strength to continue her work of healing.

For many months Palesa made the healing waters.

That is, until the day something started killing the flowers. The strange occurrence started slowly. First the sunflowers closed and refused to open in the morning. They simply crumbled and died. Then the roses followed, and the jasmine, daisies, lavender and chamomile. Palesa and Zenzo were at a loss. They watered the flowers regularly and generally took very good care of them, and yet they continued to die. They had to turn many patients away, as they had no more flowers. This affected many people as they grew more and more unwell and unhappy.

Palesa prayed for an answer. It came in a dream revealing that she had to return to the place where she came from. In the dream, she saw her parents, and knew where they were. She dreamt of ancestors who had fought each other because of greed, their lust for power had infected current generations, continuing the cycle of destruction. For healing to continue and be successfully completed, the cycle of greed and selfishness first had to be broken. Palesa would have to start within herself, by going to the place of her birth, and cleansing the sins committed by those who came before her.

In the morning, Palesa told Zenzo about the dream. They caught the train that delivered them to the city that Palesa had left behind. They arrived in the township where Palesa's mother and father lived.

Palesa's parents could not hide their joy and relief at seeing their daughter. They had worried intensely since her mysterious disappearance a year ago. They were happy to see her and to meet Zenzo. Palesa told them about her life at the foot of a hill that used to grow abundant flowers. She told them about the inexplicable death of the flowers and the dream about breaking the cycle of greed and destruction.

The family fasted and prayed for days, calling on the Creator to free them from past wrongs and to clear the path for future happiness and prosperity. After days of cleansing, Palesa and Zenzo returned to their home at the foot of the hill. They planted fresh flower seeds, and waited. Within a year of planting the seeds, their homestead was a burst of new colours with roses, jasmine, lavender, chamomile, sunflowers, and daisies dancing in the gentle breeze. They prayed with those who came for the healing flower waters that all our hearts and minds be freed from greed and hate.

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END

