

that day

Sixolile Mballo

Okwasuku

*Waze u sinethemba wahamba ngokungathi babeyibhungile.
 Ngalamzuzu ndandiyazi ukuba ndikhe ndazibona
 izinto ezifana nalena amaxesha amaninzi.
 Ndinga ukuba uninzilwethu siyazibona izinto kodwa
 sidlulise xa amehlo ethu ebona iqela lamakhwenkwe
 limisa intombazana omnye walamakhwenkwe abe eqala
 inconko nalontombi amanye amakhwenkwe aqhubeke emke.*

Then Sinethemba left as if arranged. That moment I knew that I had seen such a thing many times. The best of us see things, but by-pass that with our eyes, a group of boys stopping a girl, one connecting that girl; then the rest leave. It happened, I knew I had seen it.

Now this Phukile stood very close. All around me people were walking and chatting, but he was fierce and I was too scared to cry, to be too loud. He said he was going to give me my punishment, but I could choose among four things:

One, I lie down and he beats me with a broken brick.
 Two, I keep standing there and he stabs me with a knife.
 Three, (he lifted his jacket and showed me a gun stuck into the top of his pants) keep standing there and he shoots me in the knee. Or else,

four, I walk with him, he will show me where to turn. Immediately I said I'm sorry. I begged him to forgive me, but he just said, 'Shut up, your mother's cunt.' I felt paralysed. Also my mind stopped. I only saw the top of the gun in front of me. There was a pattern on the butt-end. That was all I could think about, the pattern.

And his voice that was very angry. I said, Number Four. We walked the road back which I knew,

but suddenly he ordered me to turn into the veld
where there were no houses, where we planted maize,
the farming place that we called emasemene.

We walked down a slope, then crossed a small stream,
then through some planted plots with trees.
He then forced me to turn off the road
into long grass and up a hill. I don't know why,
but I had never noticed this hill.

It was new to me. It had a few large rocks
coming out of the ground, but the grass was very high.

At a place with a lot of thick high grass he ordered me
to take my clothes off. I was aware that there was such a thing
as rape, it was called *dlwengulwa* – we heard that Fuagase,
one of the girls in my class, was raped by her uncle.
But we didn't know at all what that meant.

When the uncle passed us, we would excitedly shout, '*iSidlwengu*'
(let us run, here comes the rapist!) and run away, pretending to be sacred.

But we did not know exactly what rape was.
This girl was very lively and we all liked her,
but at one time we realised that she had
simply become quieter and quieter.
We heard that her uncle used a knife.

We thought that rape had something to do with violence
and a knife – especially when we heard how she bled.

I just stood there in the grass.
Phukile took out the gun.
My mind was telling me I was going to be done to
as to Fuagase – so I didn't want to take off my skirt –
He pointed the gun and said he would kill me.

I didn't want to die. I knew very strongly then,
I didn't want to die.

Phukile's eyes were red and his face angry,
but for some reason he then began to speak softly.

My body became cold. I was sweating.
I saw my friend Dwaza walking with his friends
down there on the riverbank footpath,

the distance between the gun and my friend
across the river seemed not crossable.

Fear was behind my whole body.
I took off my skirt. The gun pointed at my panties.
He ordered me to lie down.
I wanted to move some of the sharp stones,
but he already had his pants off.

He wore old navy underpants. He lied down on me.
He put the gun beside my head. He raped me.

I didn't look. I tried to close everything.
I turned my head away from the gun. I closed my eyes.
Things reached my nose. I smelled grass and wet soil.
I smelled that he smelled like somebody who was wet
and then dried. He smelt sour.

It was excruciatingly sore.
I didn't try to work out what he was doing.

It was just this terrible pain and all the movement.
He said over and over, '*Thula, thula!*' because I cried all the time.
Then I began to smell myself. I smelled the Clear Dawn
I used for my skin. Even later the Dark and Lovely on my hair
in the heat and dust. Since that day, I stopped using those things.

Also the small golden earrings
I had on that day. Never to be worn since.

It did not feel long, but I wasn't sure.
After he got up, he gave me my panties and skirt.
I couldn't walk properly and was now crying bitterly.
He said I should stay there. I put on my clothes.
He put on his clothes. Then we sat on the ground.

I was not thinking anything.
Maybe I was thinking nothing worse can happen.

When it got dark, he said I should go with him to his home;
I said no I wanted to go to my home. He refused.

Then he asked me whether my uncle had a gun,
I said I didn't know. My uncle is a prison warder in Kokstad.

Then Phukile got up and said we must go. I began
to feel afraid again. What was this now?

He looked nervous. He suddenly asked me who I was going to tell?
I said I was going to tell my uncle. I said it straight.
Then he pushed me with the gun and ordered me to go with him.
He held the gun in a shooting position under his jacket.
If I didn't walk fast enough, he bumped into me so I could feel the gun.

We then went to his home. Their homestead was like ours,
a main house with a few rondavels and extra structure.

He locked me in his two room structure and left.
In one room were a double bed and a wardrobe.
There was a table next to the bed with a candle in a bottle.
In the sitting room were two couches and a table with chairs.
I waited and couldn't think.

A few seconds after he left, I pushed myself through a small window.
I was just busy getting my feet through when he was suddenly there, all over me.

He cursed and grabbed me.
He was very violent, asking me where I was going.
I said I wanted to pee.
He said, 'Pee here in front of me, you liar.'
I did pee. I was very lucky that I peed.

Then we went inside again and he locked the door.
After a while he brought me a mug with some green rotten-smelling water.

At gunpoint he forced me to drink it.
I didn't black out. I thought I would, but I didn't.
It did absolutely nothing to me.
Then he asked me to take off my clothes again.
He raped me again.

Then he slept and asked me to sleep next to him while he held the gun in his hand.
He raped me again that night around one and again at four. It felt as if he never slept.

Then he came with water and asked me to wash.
I refused. 'I will wash at home.'
'Okay let me take you home,' he said,
and then I saw him putting three bullets into the gun.

It was still dark, but I saw it.

It was the first time in my life to see a real bullet.
It was dark but it looked goldish. I saw that.

I know that this Phukile loaded the gun in front of me
so that I should be afraid. The gun was there to get me to be raped.
I was raped. So why now the bullets all of a sudden?
It was about four in the morning,
dark and I don't know why, but also cold.

We went and in all the houses we passed, nobody was awake.
We were taking the road back to Grandmother's house.

Just before we had to turn right into the road this Phukile said
we should turn left. I said no, why? He said there was something
he wanted to check in there at the school.
I started crying. He pointed the gun directly at my chest.
The gun was wrapped with a cloth.

He ordered me to walk in front of him.
He walked behind and said that I should go to the ladies toilets.

The toilets were made with zink behind the school,
just where the ridge began to slope down into a valley.
There was no house towards that side.
What happened there would not be known.
We got into the small passage.

He checked each of the four pit latrines in their dark cubicles,
He said, '*Zicwele ezitoilets!*' They were all brimming with excrement.

The smell told one that it was piling up there for years.
I was confused. I asked, 'What do you want with the toilets?
Why do you say they are full?' I kept at the questions.
He didn't answer me. And suddenly before I could look around,
he lifted his hand. I didn't see, but felt it.

He shot me right in front of my left ear.
I didn't see it coming. I just fell.

I came to my senses. I wanted to open my eyes,
something told me not to move. I felt how he picked
me up at my hips from my feet's side. As he lifted my legs,
I heard my slipslops falling. My head flopped for a moment

and then I just felt how my head sank into a pit-latrine broth.

My head was completely submerged, my arms were hanging over the hard rim of the knee high latrine.

I don't know how it was possible,
but I made no sound of gasping in all that liquid.
My mouth didn't open.
Yet I was not suffocating.
Perhaps my body had already died.

But then, dazed as I was, I felt how he tried to stamp my head deeper into the hole at the bottom of the pit.

As if he wanted me to disappear into that hole.
My shoulders on the rim prevented that he broke my neck.
I felt no pain. I breathed slightly, I think.
I think that the blood from the wound was covering my face and formed protection between me and the excrement.

I knew I was shot.
But was slipping into thinking I was dead.

At one stage I realised that he was no longer busy with me, but was so given up that I just stayed like that, listening for him. After ten minutes, I think it was, I felt my feet flop to the floor. Slowly I lifted my head. I don't know how long I sat there. I couldn't walk. I decided to die there.

After a while I felt I was still there.
Then I crawled for two seconds then passed out.

When I came to, I crawled again for two seconds, then lay down waiting to die. Then again. I crawled out of the toilet. I was in the open air. I lay down. Then started again, through the school yard, out the gate More than three hundred meters... some light and the voices of people

wakening.

(translated from isiXhosa)