

the first time

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Die eerste keer

Ek was Agnes, Aggie, se "Sunshine". Sy't vir al drie van ons 'n bynaam gehad. Sy was 'n klein, kort donkerswart oumatjie met katvormbrille, met so 'n retro-krul in die hoeke. Sy was 'n lid van die ZCC-Kerk. Op haar bors het sy 'n silwerster-op-groenvelvet gedra. Ek was baie lief vir haar.

Aggie, Agnes, had a name for each of us, but I was her 'Sunshine'. She was a short, but strong, older black lady, with retro-curved spectacles that looked like cats eyes. No matter what she wore, she always had the silver-on-green-felt ZCC-badge pinned on the left side of her chest. I loved her very much.

I was nearly ten-years old when we moved to Wilkeville. Initially we stayed in the caravan park on the Ventersdorp road. That December in 1979 felt like a permanent holiday. Then, in January, we moved to 95 Siddle Street, mid-town. All three of us were starting at a new school. Only my sister had a school uniform – she was in standard six. My brother wore his grey uniform and my mom made me an A-line dress from old, yellow crimplene curtaining which resulted in endless teasing at school. Many evenings all of us went window-shopping after dinner. We'd run around and play while mom and dad looked at cars and furniture and stuff. Our dreams were about different things then.

Mom didn't work. Every day after school she would have lunch ready for us. She'd help us with our homework, remind us to put our bikes away. The parquet flooring shone like mirrors in the afternoon sun, there was always a fresh smell of wax on Thursday afternoons – red for the stoep and white for the inside. Years later I discovered that all three of us recall this one memory, of an afternoon coming back from school and the table being set on the stoep. It was hot, and in the shade was a bowl of picked-off seedless sultanas, a jug of milk and a freshly, home-baked bread with butter and homemade apricot jam. The lawn was extra green, set against the half-a-metre of raw brick wall trimming running around the house. We ate and talked and laughed the entire afternoon. In our house milk was a luxury and I was often caught and spanked for having a white moustache. But that day I could drink as much milk as I wanted to. We drew pictures, said silly rhymes, played hangman, and later helped Mom to clear the table.

The change came quickly. Dad decided that mom had to go back to work, only one year after her drastic hysterectomy. After working for the Mercedes Benz agency in Margaretha Prinsloo street, not far from home, he sought greener pastures at Clows Motors in the main road. He became the parts manager and had a company car. Mom got work as a collections clerk at Ben de Wet and Co., somewhere in town. They bought a house in the suburbs, 19 Albertus Avenue, Wilkeville. The yard was huge, with a few trees strategically placed for maximum shade. There was a pergola with the juiciest, green grapes covering the concrete, dual-track driveway leading up to the single

garage. The garden path was lined with flower boxes made of blocks of varnished slate. The front door was framed by yellow glass panels with a circular pattern. In the back yard several tired fruit trees clung on for dear life, and in front of the sliding door on the back stoep there was the most beautiful, stately oak tree with a swing rope. The grass grew in patches, but hardly made a lawn. All in all, the garden was well-designed. In the slate flower boxes the zinnias were erect and variegated.

Across from us, lived a family of six – mom, dad, three daughters and a son. Amber was the same age as Carla, and Peter the same age as my brother. We played together almost every day. Peter's skin was dark and he had the most beautiful, light-blue eyes. Once when we were playing kleilat, he managed to throw the clay at me so hard, that my ears were literally ringing from the pain. But we were great friends. My brother, always tried to shake me off, so that they could play on their own. He often yelled at me to, 'Leave us alone!'

One summer's day, we were hanging around under the pergola, eating grapes. They were chatting about things I didn't understand – stuff like 'wet dreams' and 'morning glories'. Typical of a nosy, annoying sister I asked what they were talking about. My brother laughed and winked at Peter, saying: 'Sharrap, I'll explain later.' With that, I was appeased and we stayed out until the shadows were skewed and long.

On the Friday my brother instructed me to come to my mom's sewing room, as soon as Aggie left. I was to tell no one, because he was going to share a big secret with me. It was so nice to be in cahoots with him, like when we were younger. I could not wait for Aggie to leave, so I rode my bike in the street so as not to give away the secret. Aggie blew me a kiss and I wished her a great weekend. As soon as she disappeared around the corner, I rushed my bike into the courtyard with its washing line and went looking for my brother. Carla was in standard 6 and was probably at school for a piano lesson or an athletics event. Her high school was in town and she and my brother had to cycle very far to get to their schools. He was in an all-boys Technical High School, I was in Saamtrek Primary, standard 2.

In the sewing room there was a collapsible, coir single-bed. The mattress was narrow, and mom covered it with a thick, musty yellow throw with diamond patterns all over it. At the foot and the head of the bed there were stickers of the Caltex-bunny, super heroes and Formula 1 racing cars. When my dad worked at Clifton Motors in Harrismith, he often brought them home for us. We weren't meant to stick them on the furniture and he gave us each one of those dangling-in-the-air hidings, while screaming: 'If you cry, I will hit the shit out of you!'

And that is where my brother sat waiting for me; on that narrow mattress, behind the door. The afternoon sun was sluggishly trickling through the opening in the curtains. The rest of the house was so quiet. He told me to take my panties off and to lie down on the bed. I knew we were going to play doctor-doctor now – he would show me his winky and he would look at my cookie. He took his shorts off and pulled his winky from his underpants. I was quite impressed actually, because I have never seen such a big one before. But suddenly I noticed that my brother looked funny. He was licking his lips all the time and kept on pulling on his thing with his thumb and forefinger in the shape of a ring. It kept on getting bigger and a few times there was white stuff oozing from the tip. Unexpectedly I found myself in a different space. He was breathing very fast. He started touching and rubbing my cookie. I didn't like it very much, but I was as if hypnotised. Out of the blue he pushed his finger into me. I screamed and tried to

get up. He told me to lie still and to pull my knees all the way up in the air – it will hurt less that way. I did what he said and he took his thing and shoved it up into me. I yelled out that it was very sore, that he should stop, but he was deaf and mute. The throw under me was rough, smelled of dust and was grazing my back. His head was turned away from me and he kept on pounding himself into me. The pain was unbearable. I kept on begging him to stop. I tried to get out from under him, but the pounding was coming faster and faster and in an instant his head jerked back and he convulsed until he slumped down on me. He slid off of me and said: ‘The first few times are not nice’. He picked up his clothes and I could hear him go into the bathroom. There was a horrible mess on his pants in front. I could feel that I was also dirty and sticky down there. I remember thinking that if my parents had come home now, they would kill us.

I am with my legs flat again. There is a deep pain in my stomach area. I go and pee and call out for my brother, but he’s gone. It’s just me in the house. Later I go back to the sewing room, but the bed is neatly made up and all the bags of wool and scrap heaps of material have been put back on the bed. It’s like we were never there. I go to Carla’s and my bedroom to change – there is a mess all over my shorts. I feel the tears well up from the intense pain. I decide to ride my bicycle again – if I’m outside he can’t hurt me. Besides, if anybody sees that I cried I will be in deep trouble as well. I take Carla’s bike. It’s a black thin-wheeled bike and the saddle is too high for me to sit on – I don’t think I can sit down anyway. I cycle to the first stop-street, turn left into Coral Street and keep going until I am about to cross Voss Street. From there I am able to spot my parents’ car. They drive a white Alfa Giulietta. My dad picks up my mom in the afternoon. The road is very busy, because it is the main road out of Klerksdorp, on the way to the caravan park.

I ride up and down, go into the café, but leave because I don’t have money. It feels like everyone knows about what happened to me. I race home to make sure I didn’t perhaps miss the white car. I jump off the bike too fast in the driveway and I feel the pain cut up from between my legs. I make a turn through the house. Everything is quiet, as if in suspended animation – the laundry is clean, ironed and folded. Everything in its place. I go to the toilet and push my finger in to get rid of the stickiness. I cringe from the pain, flush the loo and wash my hands vigorously. Outside, the courtyard is clad in shadows and cold; the grapes on the pergola are dusty, and tufts of grass are breaking through the cracks in the driveway. I race back to Voss Street. I sit with my feet on the warm cement block and stick twigs down the holes in the anthill – watch how they scatter. I see our car! I jump on my bike and race home. I put the bike in the shed and hurry up the oak tree in the back garden. My mom comes to say they are home. I jump down and hit the cement hard with my heels. Don’t cry! I make coffee for everyone. Carla got a lift with mom and dad. We’re all sitting in the lounge with the newly-made curtains. Apparently my brother is across the road, playing without me. Everyone chats about their day and even asks about mine. I say ‘nothing special happened to me today’, but swear mom knows something.

Before dinner I take a bath. I try to shove the facecloth inside of me to clean myself. It stays sticky. It is burning and hurting all over again. I start crying. Then I hear mom’s footsteps and I muffle my tears with my facecloth. ‘Why aren’t you done yet?’ ‘No man, hurry UP, the food is getting cold!’ My red-veined eyes promise to be quick. I dry myself off, put on my teddy bear pajamas and join them at the dinner table. My mom made my brother’s favourite: Shepherd’s Pie.

(translated from Afrikaans)