

Ken jy My Hart?

Gaireyah Fredericks

Ek is een vanne twieling. Op 'n paa mâne val my suster op haa kop en daana begin sy fit. Epileptiese aanvalle soes die doktus ôs verduidelik et. Soe nou was sy die siek kint en ek die invisible, of soe het ek daao gevoel. As sy 'n fit gekry et moes ek by haa sit in case sy wee een kry. My ma-hulle't dan tiê oppie stoep gedrink en gesels en ek't yti kamevenster die kinnes en my niggies sien aeroplane-hokkie oppie pavement voorie hys sien speel, while ek my siste guard.

Ek kan onhou. In primary skool. In stanerd vier. Dai jaar wassit op sy ergste. As sy oppie skool 'n toeval gekry et, dat ekkie net geworry dat sy sal dood gani, ma oek geworry ori kinnes wat ek moet regsien wat nog kans sien ve haa condition mock deur hulle gesigte te trek soes sy lyk as sy fight om asem te kry. Wanne sy fit, is haa brein oxygen deprived en kannit breindood cause. Hulle hettie dai gewietie en niemand herrit ve hulle ooit gesê nie, ma ek het gewiet. En ek't nooit kans gekry om eers dit te onthou innie moment ie, want ek moes sieke maak sy's op haa linke sy en haa tong probee sy nie afbyt ie. Soe ek moes focus en amal ytbloek en ma die bysake virrie aftermath los. Dit was horrible en ek was daa. Deur alles, amper altyd. Ek was haa bodyguard.

Ek onthou eendag in stander ses het sy nie lekka gevoelie ennie skool het haa huis toe gestu sône my knowledge, sône my ma se knowledge en ek't toe vannit gehoo, ma ek koni hystioe haloep agter haa nie. Ek moes nog altyd Wiskinde vestaan en my hand opstiek ommie anwore te gie as juffrou praat. Sy't oekie van my suste gewiet ie, soe ek koni ve haa kwaad wiesie. Later byri hys het ek gehoo sy't byri ghuffie 'n fit gekry en die ai wat ôs twie kee 'n dag daao sien loep hystoe en trug, het haa gesien siek wôd en haa gehelp—en na ôs neighbour se hys toe gevat. Dai dag was ek bly sy was darem safe. Kinnes dink mossie aan wat kan metta jong meisie gebeur wat nie by haa volle positiewe ytepass langs 'n ghuffie se oewers lê soes 'n mak lammechie waiting to be preyed on nie, so ek't nie my ma se kopsee dai aand gedeel ie. Al het sy die ai gaan bedank wattie biesems vleg en polite haa dogtus groet as hulle vyf dae 'n wiek skool toe stap en oppe Sondag ytie geel 5L atchaar-emmechie koesiestus vekoop ie. Sy was nog altyd ongemaklik mettie hele intimate interaction van haa dogte en 'n vriendeling.

Ek onhou een naskool mirrag het ek en sussa by die buite aangeboude extension vani kitchen die skorregoed vani brekfis ennie supper wat ôsse ma begin et voo sy moes wêk toe gaan, skoongemaak en sy't sonne warning, oppie engin wat metta ou mat gecover was, met haa gesig geval en haa bril het haa oeg lelik gesny. By die tyd het ôs al gewiet die fits is rife assit ôs period tyd was, soe ek was vigilant, ma ôs het net skorregoed gedoen. Dai was ma al. Wie sou nou kon dink dit sal een trigger.

Sy't oppie engin, oorgebuk, wild begin ruk en ek koni haa oplik ie. Ek kon oekie bel ie, want die phone was in ôs ma se kame. Ek't ie warm bloed op my hand gevoel tap toe ek ha kop probee hou yt harmsway en gewag, while ek salawaat hard batcha deurie warme trane oo my wange en in my agterkop, agter my stem wat biewe oo my lippe duah gemaak en Allah vra om haa net genoeg oxygen te gie virre nogge dag. Ek't oek gevra sy moet nog haa oeg het en haa gesig moeties lelik wies ie, want dan sal my job om haa te protect, soveel even harder wies. Ek sal dan die koggelry oek nog moet mie deal en ek was moeg, baie moeg. Sy't eventually subside en ek't mammie gebel en syt kô help en haa dokter toe gevat. Algamdulillaah, ha gesig was gespaar, sowel as haa bril, ma mammie koni plastic lense afford

et ie, soe sy moes 'n anne paa glas lense ma wee kry. Ôs moes manet dophou. Dai wassie solution – my solution. Da was baie recentment at times. Ek't gevoel asof ek nooit die baar sal kan escape ie.

Ek onthou toe ôs een jaa gaa kamp et by Buffelsjag. Ek was al op hoërskool. Sy was by 'n special needs skool in Kraaifontein. Bet-el. Sy't by my ma se niggie gebly in die wêreld en net naweke en holiday's hystoe gekom. Et was lekka as mens mekaa gesmis et. Even more special toe aali niggies en niefies oek saam opi kamp was. Klomp kinnes tesame wassit baie lekka. Ek onthou dat ek en my suster baie lief was virrie water. My ma oek, ma sy't ie altyd saamgegan, want sy't my susterchie verwag ennie duine wat mens moes oor stap om byri sië te kom het haa moeg gemaak, so toe gaan ek en my suster aliën. Et was lekka. Ôs het heeltyd braners gespring en geskrie assie grotes aankom en ôs mekaa moet gryp en vashou, annes rol ôs saam ie stoot vannie braner. Ôs hare het soes pap toue rondgewaai en soms op ôs gesigte geplak gesit. En soms wassit in ôs monne en souterag. Et was rare wat ôs saam stout was, ma dit was een van dai dae wat as ôssie lieg ie, was ôs dag te boring, so ôs was eintlik illegally byrie water.

Ôs hettie 'n shaperone saamgevera nie. Die branders het mee aggressive begin raak en die water het harder begin stoot, sterker begin intrek, ma ôs het bankvas mekaa support en gelag ve ôs moë jelliebiene sometimes. Ôs was focused op fun en lekka joeleit soes kinnes mos is. Ôs hettie gewiet die draai vani water ennie monotonous in en yt vani branders se geslied kan 'n trigger ve my suste se condition issie en toerie brande slat en ek haa vasgryp, val ôs deurie brander grond toe en ôs is onne in. Begrawe onne wille water en skuim. Ek't haa net bly klou ma haa stywe arms in my brace het my clues narië dire moment wat ôs in is, gegie. Ek't gewiet. Ek't oek gewiet sy kani haa asem ophou soes my nie. Haa body soek nou asem ommie beurt en sy kry net water. Ek moes vinnag dink en my oë onnerie water oephou. Ek't toe onne haa ingeslide en haa opgelig. Haa body was swaa, ma ek't gemanage om haa op my skoot tien my bors te kry, solat haa kop boe rie water sal bly.

Sy't my saam geruk, ma ek was stêk. Ek't my hakke in die sand geplant en getrap. Soes ek nog nooit kon trap ie. Die eerste wave het trug gegaan en sy was nogi kla nie. Ek't biechie relax en haa op my bôe laat rus. Die tweede een het gou na dai een approach en ek't haa wee opgelig, terwyl ek my asem diep intrek en die borreltjies starag deur my nies laat glip et. Ek kan goed swem. Ek't gewiet van my longe met asem vul. Die brander het ytgesak en wee kon ek asem en haa lat sak. Ek't heeltyd probee yfigure, hoe ek kon opstaan en haa in tyd yti sudden gestrande diep branders in tyd kon kry, ma ek konnie figure dit asse possible valid solution ie. En daa wassie tyd ve dry-runs ie. Die dère een was fierce en het met vengenge aangerol. Is oo ôs en ek het haa bly hou. En toe sak sussa yt en druk my af grond toe. Sy's kla. 'n Dooie gewig, lam. Oek goeie timing soesie brande wee trug trek. Ek kyki brander agterna en beyond wa die anne konfedereer my dood en ek sit cradled met die dooie gewig op my skoot. En soesie water my bestorm skrie ek 'biesmiellaah' en lig haa met al my might, ma sy's beyond my means. Ek knyp my oë en lig al wat ek kan, hou my bors vol asem en voel haa body lig yt my arms, weg na boe. Ek skrik en maak my oë wild oep. Hanne vat my kras ommie armpits en ruk my lat ek deur my tooinghare oo my gesig geplak die blou lug sien peep na my.

Iemand het ôs gesien en ko help. Hulle't my en haa narië wal geslied en ek't net bly lê, uit asem. Na die mooi skoon blou lig gekyk en ge asem. Finally het ek my kop gedraai en na haa gekyk. Die man wat gelyk et of hy van medical goed wiet het gese sy's fine en my 'n smile met wore ge uiter, ma ek kon niks behalwe my polsklop in my nek in my ore hoo klop ie. Ek kon net my eie liewe for once hoo. Voel. Ek wiet dit was maybe selfish om dai in die situation soe baie te enjoy, ma ek wou net hoo hoe ek nog klink voorit weggaan, afterall ek't in die womb twie heart beats gehad wat my constantly distract et van my eie. En een was uniquely myne. After all that, life went on as usual. Ek was wee oppe pos en in uniform reporting for duty. Ôs het opgegroeie en liewe het gebeur.

Een dag, net voo Maghrib. Ek was al getroud, sit ek met my toddler oppie skoot en voel cronically vaak, soveel soe ek kani my baby vashou nie. Ek vra my man om hom te vat en dink is sieke wee die famous ghaamiel slapies wat klop ve aandag. Mens't mos soema instant fatigue as mens pregnant is. Ek sit soema my kop net daa langs my oppie bank neer en snork-slaap instantly. My phone lui kort narit en ek skrik wakke metta shock. My hart race soema soes ekkie groen knoppie swipe. Is my ma. Sy bel en praat met my asof sy gejaa wôd.

Sy sê sy kennie die ambulance se nomme nie, nog minne kan syrit onhou of innie directory kry en ek moerit ve haa gie. Ek wietie hoekom syrit soekie en ek vra haa heeltyd, ma sy repeat haaself oek heeltyd. My hart race starger en in my mind kry ek nettie gevoel en ek wiet hoekom en vra haa wats fout met my suster. Sy verduidelik my sy is blou ommie lippe en sy't haa met gesig innie kussing in haa kame gekry. Sy verduidelik dat sy dink sy't gefit en sy's blou en sy repeat als wee oo. My hart drop instantly soes ekkie puzzle complete en my gesig trek en ek huil sône ienage sound. Ek kan ie lelik op my gesig voel. Ek huil lelik. Ek laat haa aancarry en my—of eerde haaself verduidelik wat ek dink ek wiet sy nou haarself van deny en kry my bearings geleidelik om te respond. Ek sluk my hies in my keel tot in my maag waarit die hol gevoel solank moet company hou en verduidelik haa kalm die procedure en sit die phone neer. My man staan toe al naby en vestaan ek moet nou gaan en hulle byri hospital gaan meet. Hy bel sy broer met die kar en ôs ry silently narie hospital innie dorp.

Ek enter die breë emergency entrance se corridor en meet my skoonsuster wat net haa kop skud en huil. Ek skud my kop oék en my krop borrel op soes 'n volcano wat genoeg gehad het. Ek radiate loss. My binnepeul na byte.

'Waa is sy?' compose ek myself.

Sy wys my 'n kamertjie wa sy lê en ek enter en vattie draai wat die hospitaal kooi conceal. Sy lê op haa rug, stil. Vaal. Haa spark is missing. Haa hand soes ekkie erken as sy fit is nog gevou ennit roep na my. Ek gryp haa hand en force my grip solat ôs 'n nechiese puzzle vorm. My wange bly warm. Ek smelt. My exoskeleton is stukkend. Ek ooze van pyn. Daar's g'n plan wat ek kan ytdink ie. Sy het ophou asem haal. My presence mien niks. Al hou ek my asem op sal et ie baatie. Is overs. Sy's kla. Ek gooi my arms om haa stywe skoues wat bly lê en druk my tien haa bos vas.

'Ai hene my suster. Ek wou jou nog sê ek is lief ve jou. Ek was nourie dag van plan toe jy byrie zienk gestaan en skorregeod wassit. Toe jy yti pad slightly geskyf et om my 'n sight te gie om my hanne te was. Ek wourit saggies sê lat hulle nie innie koebys kan hoorie, ma toe bedink ek myself wee en bly stil, want ôs wassie gelee om mekaa et te sêrie. Ommit te wys ja, ma nie te sêrie. Ek't even nog nooit jou 'n birthday gift of kaachie in ôs liewe gemaakie. Junne, ek hoep jy wiet ek was lief ve jou. Ek wens jou body kon jou narie fit vertel dat die arms wat jou gehelp et en vasgehou et, afgespons en salwaat oo jou gebatcha et was ek en et was met soveel liefde gedoen. Soveel care. Well, it's all done now. Jy kan nou virrie eerste kee in hoeveel jaa nie worry oo 'n fit kry of gekoggel wôdtie. En mammie se question aan Allah oo wat met jou sal gebeurit as sy nie mee hie issie. Is nou geantwood. Jy's mos nou voo haa weg. Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'oen. From Allah we come and verily to Allah we shall return. Wassalaam my suster. Ek is lief ve jou.'

Ek notice op haa hand mettie laaste glance soes ek haa nou virrie laaste inneem, soes sy was, my 21st ring wat mammie ôs gekoepit. Ek onhou hoekom sy my ring het. Ek herrit ve haa gegie na ôs eendag gerop was oppad na iemand toe. Sy was soe upset, sy kon nie haa rus gekry et ie, afterall die mes was tien haa nek. Ek was kalm. Ek't die situation vinnag access en gewiet as sy nou moet fit, sny dai lem haa involuntary. Ek het my nuwe Nike tekkies wat ek self voo gewekit uitgetrek ennit gegie. Ma toe sien die jong wat haa gehourit haa ring en trek it yt haa vinge soes hy weg haloep. Ek't myne afgehaal ennit op haa vinge gesit. Haa gesê sy karrit eendag ve my trug gie as sy dit nie mee need nie—offe anne een kry. Sy was twee-en-dertag toe Epilepsie gewen et. Ek was sône my ma se twenny-first-garnet-birthday-stone-gift, since then. Ek't dit van haa vinge losgewikkel ennit aan myne gesit. Haa shukran gesê—lat syrit soe mooi opgepas et en haa 'n soen op haa koel vookop gegie. Byrie hoek het ek wee vasgestiek, omgedraai en wee net gestare in nog altyd disbelief. My vuiste was clinged, asof my body haa probee mimic et en toe vra ek haa sincere maaf dat ekkie daa wassie.

DO YOU KNOW MY HEART?

Gaireyah Fredericks

(Translated by Robyn Gelant)

I am one of twins. When my sister was a few months old, she fell on her head and thereafter, she started having seizures. Epileptic attacks as the doctors explained to us. So now she was the sick child, and I was the invisible one, or at least that's how I felt about it. If she had a seizure, I had to sit with her in case she had another one. My mother-them would drink tea and chat on the porch, and from the window of the room, I watched the children and my cousins playing aeroplane-hokkie on the pavement in front of the house, while I was guarding my sister.

I can remember. In primary school. In standard four. That year it was at its worst. If she had a seizure at school, I was not only worried about her possibly dying, but I also had to deal with children who saw her condition as an opportunity to mock her by pulling faces, imitating how she looked when she struggled to breathe. When she has seizures, her brain is oxygen-deprived and it could cause her to become brain-dead. They didn't know that and no one ever told them, but I knew. And I never even got a chance to remember that in the moment, because I had to make sure she was lying on her left side and wasn't biting her tongue. So I had to focus and block everyone out and leave the rest for the aftermath. It was horrible, and I was there. Through everything, almost always. I was her bodyguard.

I remember one day in standard six, she wasn't feeling well and the school sent her home without my knowledge, without my mother's knowledge. I eventually heard about it, but couldn't rush home after her. I still had to understand Mathematics and raise my hand to give answers when the teacher spoke. She also didn't know about my sister, so I couldn't be angry at her. Later at home, I heard she had a seizure near the footbridge. The Rasta, whom we often saw walking over there to and from home twice a day, saw her getting sick and helped her - and took her to our neighbour's house. That day I was glad she was safe at least. Children don't think about what can happen to a young girl who is not fully aware, passed out by the footbridge of a river's bank like a helpless lamb waiting to be preyed on, so I didn't share my mother's headache that evening. Although she went to thank the Rasta who weaves the brooms and politely greets her daughters as they walk to school five days a week, and who also sells koeksiestus from the yellow 5L atchar jar on Sundays, she was still uncomfortable about the whole intimate interaction between her daughter and a stranger.

I remember one afternoon after school. My sister and I were in the extension that had been built onto the kitchen, washing the breakfast and supper dishes that our mother had started before she had to go to work. Without warning, she fell face-first onto the engine that was covered with an old mat, and her glasses cut her eye badly. By then, we already knew that the seizures were rife when we were menstruating, so I was vigilant, but we were just doing the dishes. That was all. Who would have thought that it would trigger one.

She was bent over the engine and started jerking wildly, and I couldn't lift her. I also couldn't make a call because the phone was in our mother's room. I felt her warm blood drip onto my hand as I tried to keep her head out of harm's way and I waited, while loudly reciting the Salawat prayer through the warm tears on my cheeks and in the back of my head. My voice trembled on my lips as I prayed asking Allah to just give her enough oxygen for another day. I also prayed that she would still have her eye and that her face mustn't look ugly, because then my job to protect her would be so much harder. I would then have to deal with the teasing as well, and I was tired, very tired. The seizure eventually subsided, and I called my mother who came to help and took her to the doctor. Praise be to Allah, her face was spared, as well as her frames, but mommy couldn't afford plastic lenses, so she would have to get another pair of glass lenses. We just had to keep an eye out. That was the solution - my solution. There was a lot of resentment at times. I felt as if I would never escape this burden.

I remember when we went camping one year at Buffelsjag. I was already in high school. She was at a special needs school in Kraaifontein, Bet-el. She stayed with my mother's cousin during the week and only came home on weekends and holidays. It was nice to miss each other. It was even more special when all the cousins were also together at the camp. When a lot of the children were together it was very nice. I remember that my sister and I loved the

water. My mother did too, but she didn't always go with us, because she was pregnant with my little sister and the dunes that we had to walk over to get to the sea made her tired, so my sister and I went alone. It was nice. We were jumping over waves and screaming as the big ones came and we had to grab and hold onto each other, otherwise we would roll together with the push of the wave. Our hair was tossed around like limp ropes and sometimes stuck to our faces. And sometimes it went in our mouths, and it was salty. It was rare for us to be naughty together, but that was one of those days where if we didn't lie, our day would be too boring, so we were actually illegally by the water.

We didn't ask for a chaperone to go with us. The waves started to get more aggressive, and the water started pushing harder, pulling in stronger, but we were firmly supporting each other and laughed at our tired jelly legs sometimes. We were focused on fun and being jolly, as children usually are. We didn't know that the twist of the water and the monotonous in and out movements of the waves could be a trigger for my sister's condition, and when that wave hit and I grabbed her, we fell through the wave to the ground, and we were under. Buried under wild water and foam. I just kept clinging to her but her stiff arms in my embrace gave me clues of the dire moment we were in. I knew. I also knew she couldn't hold her breath like me. Her body was now gasping for breath in turn, and she only got water. I had to think quickly and keep my eyes open underwater. I then slid under her and lifted her up. Her body was heavy, but I managed to get her on my lap against my chest, so that her head would stay above the water.

She jerked me with her strength, but I was strong. I planted my heels in the sand and pushed. Like I had never been able to push before. The first wave retreated, and she was not done yet. I relaxed a bit and let her rest on my chest. The second one approached quickly after that one and I lifted her again, while taking in a deep breath and slowly letting the bubbles sneak out through my nostrils. I can swim well. I knew about filling my lungs with air. The wave receded and I could breathe and lowered her again. I was trying to figure out how I could stand up and get her out of the sudden deep waves in time, but I couldn't figure out a possible valid solution. And there was no time for dry runs. The third one was fierce and rolled in with a vengeance. It was over us and I kept holding on to her. And then she collapsed and pushed me down to the ground. She was done. A dead weight, limp. Also good timing as the wave retreated again. I watched the wave retreat afterwards and beyond where the others conspire my death, and I sat cradled with the dead weight on my lap. And as the water stormed me, I shouted 'In the name of God', and lifted her with all my might, but she was beyond my means. I squeezed my eyes and lifted all I could, kept my chest full of air and felt her body lift out of my arms, away upwards. I was shocked and I opened my eyes wildly. Hands grabbed me firmly around the armpits and pulled me, so I saw the blue sky peeping at me through my stringy hair stuck to my face.

Someone saw us and came to help. They dragged both of us to the shore and I just laid there, out of breath. Looking at the beautiful, clean, blue sky and breathing. Finally, I turned my head and looked at her. The man who looked like he knew about medical stuff said she was fine and gave me a comforting smile and uttered words, but I could hear nothing but the thumping in my ears from the pulse in my neck. I could only hear my own heartbeat for once. Feel it. I knew it might be selfish to enjoy this so much in this situation, but I just wanted to hear how I sounded before it was gone, after all, I had two heartbeats in the womb that constantly distracted me from my own. And one was uniquely mine. After all that, life went on as usual. I was back on guard and in uniform reporting for duty. We grew up and life happened.

One day, just before Maghrib. I was already married and sitting with my toddler in my lap, feeling chronically tired, so much so that I couldn't hold my baby. I asked my husband to take him and thought it was probably those famous pregnancy sleeps that demand attention. A person can not get instantly fatigued when pregnant. I put my head down, right there next to me on the couch and fell into a snoring sleep instantly. My phone rings shortly after and I wake up with a shock. My heart races as I swipe the green button. It's my mom. She calls and talks to me as if she's being chased. She says she doesn't know the ambulance's number, nor can she remember it or find it in the directory, and I must find it for her. I don't know why she needs it and I keep asking her, but she keeps repeating herself. My racing heart slows down and in my mind, I get the feeling and I know why, and I ask her what's wrong

with my sister. She explains to me that she is blue around the lips and that she found her with her face in the pillow in her room. She explains that she thinks she had a seizure and she's blue, and she repeats everything again. My heart drops instantly as I complete the puzzle, my face drops and I cry without making a sound. I can feel the ugliness on my face. I'm crying intensely. I let her carry on and I—or rather, let herself continue explaining what I think I know she's now denying to herself, and gradually get my bearings to respond. I swallow the lump in my throat, sending it down to my stomach where it joins the hollow feeling, and calmly explain to her the procedure and put the phone down. My husband is already standing nearby and understands that I must go and meet them at the hospital. He calls his brother who has a car and we drive silently to the hospital in town.

I enter the broad emergency entrance corridor and meet my sister-in-law who just shakes her head and cries. I shake my head too and my emotions well up like a volcano that's had enough. I radiate loss. My inner self overflows with grief.

"Where is she?" I compose myself.

She shows me a small room where she is laying and I enter and take the turn that conceals the hospital bed. She is laying on her back, still. Pale. Her spark is missing. Her hand, as I recognise it when she has a seizure, is still folded and it calls to me. I grab her hand and force my grip so that we form a neat puzzle. My cheeks remain warm. I melt. My exoskeleton is shattered. I ooze with pain. There's no plan that I can think of. She has stopped breathing. My presence means nothing. Even if I hold my breath, it won't help. It's over. She's gone. I throw my arms around her, her stiff shoulders remaining still and I press myself against her chest.

"Ai hene my sister. I just wanted to tell you that I love you. I was planning to say it now the other day when you stood by the sink washing dishes. When you moved slightly out the way to give me a space to wash my hands. I wanted to say it softly so they couldn't hear in the kitchen, but then I second guessed myself and remained silent, because we weren't taught to say that to each other. To show it yes, but not to say it. I never even made you a birthday gift or card in our lifetime. I hope you knew that I loved you. I wish your body could tell you, after the seizure, that the arms that helped you and held you, cleansed and prayed Salwaat over you, were mine, and it was done with so much love. So much care. Well, it's all done now. For the first time in how many years, you don't have to worry about having a seizure or being teased. And mommy's question to Allah about what would happen to you if she wasn't here anymore, is now answered. You've passed away in front of her. Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'oen. From Allah we come and verily to Allah we shall return. Goodbye my sister. I love you."

I notice on her hand, with the final glance as I take her in for the last time, just as she was, my 21st ring that mommy bought us. I remember why she has my ring. I gave it to her one day after we were robbed on our way to someone. She was so upset, she couldn't rest, after all the knife was at her neck. I was calm. I quickly assessed the situation and knew if she had a seizure now, that knife would involuntarily cut her. I took off my new Nike sneakers, which I worked for myself, and gave it to them. But then the guy who held her saw her ring and pulled it from her fingers as he ran away. I took mine off and put it on her fingers. Told her she can give it back to me one day when she doesn't need it anymore—or gets another one. She was thirty-two when the Epilepsy won. I was without my mother's twenty-first-garnet-birthday-stone-gift since then. I wiggled it loose from her finger and put it on mine. Said thank you to her for looking after it so nicely and gave her a kiss on her cold forehead. At the corner, I stood still again, turned around and just stared, still in disbelief. My fists were clenched, as if my body was trying to mimic her, and then I sincerely asked her for forgiveness for not being there.