

the  
hub

 thehubatmorija.co.ls

 thehub@morija.co.ls

 thehubatmorija

 thehubatmorija

 thehubatmorija

 (+266) 58888387

 Morija, Lesotho



WordPower 2019

A selection of pieces by  
young writers from Lesotho.

# WordPower 2019

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Cover illustration:

“Khotso” by Lehlohonolo “Proph 2|4” Tlhaole

When we lose what brought us together as a nation  
(khotso/peace), we destroy the legacy of our founder,  
King Moshoeshoe I.

Proph 2|4 Designs:



Proph24



twofordesigns



twofordesigns



prophtwofour



+266 5690 2542

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# Introduction

## The Hub @ Morija

Established in 2015, The Hub is a creative technology lab based at the Morija Museum & Archives in Lesotho. The Hub provides the community of Morija with affordable access to computers, the internet and digital media training. In addition to being open for 5 days a week as a library and resource space, The Hub delivers a variety of programs, skills sessions, motivational talks, workshops and community events.

In 2019 we've continued to work at the intersection of arts and activism. We've held workshops on a range of social issues and creative and digital media skills, including songwriting, music video production, corruption, human rights, creative writing, filmmaking, animation and storytelling in photography.

This magazine showcases the best pieces of creative writing to emerge from our activities in 2019. We're excited to see how the young writers featured in this issue have tackled a number of pressing themes – including climate change, conservation and gender-based violence. These short stories and poems also delve into everyday life in contemporary Lesotho, with some beautiful descriptions of family, friendship and love. We're proud to feature the lyrics of “Lesotho” – a song released by The Hub in 2019 – as the first piece in this issue. The song features seven local artists expressing their opinions on the current political and socio-economic situation in the country.

If you would like more information on The Hub, we'd love to hear from you! All our contact details can be found on the back cover of this magazine. Happy reading and thank you for your support!

The song 'Lesotho' was released by The Hub in September 2019 – a collaboration between seven local artists and the outcome of two weekend workshops: Songwriting with Sadon and Music Video Production with Pheello Pj Makosholo.

Download the track for free ([musicbox.co.ls](https://musicbox.co.ls)) or check out the music video on our YouTube channel ([tinyurl.com/thehubyoutube](https://tinyurl.com/thehubyoutube)) using the QR codes below:



Many thanks to the Open Society Initiative of Southern Africa (OSISA) for their support of this music project.

## Lesotho – Lyrics

by The Hub (feat. Rex Jiffy, Vertic Zee, Black Dash, Women of the Well, Meloh and Sadon)

### *Rex Jiffy*

I'm living in pain, I don't really know who to blame  
Regretting the day, ballot papers up on my face  
Le lenaleng, ink stuck for seven days, we never seen change  
The government we chose now we hate  
They giving us poverty and crime, things that we always fight  
Unemployment is very high, higher than kite in the sky  
Graduates li lutse hae, there's no other place to hide  
Ke ea ipotsa naa Lesotho le ea kae?  
Tsohle, tseo ba re tšepisitseng ba li foralletse  
Our leaders getting paid for nothing, re maketse  
We fighting poverty, ka nqena likolo li se li koetsoe  
We crying out loud, I just hope le mametse.

### *Black Dash*

Khotso ka khotla, ke qolla maqosa, hoja la thola  
Ke hlasela thota, katiba joale kea e rola, leoto kholo, tlotla kholo  
Uena Ntat'a Basotho, King Letsie III, naa ua bona naheng ea Lepoqo?  
Ha ho sa pheloa ka khotso, ho pheloa ka lenyatso  
Bokhopo le lehloeo, boroko rea bo robala,  
Feel a bo se nang litoro, re lula re lla (hii-hii), re itšela ka meokho  
Ba bangata pusong, marr ha bana thuso  
'Muso oa temetemeka, o ka 'na oa oela, paramente e tsamaea e koala  
Hara nako fela, Lesotho lea timela, banna rea shoa rea fela.

### *Vertic Zee*

Moo Lesotho re bohloko, ha ho na taba ho tla loka  
Our mother Lesotho, batho ba tlama lithoto  
Re sitoa ho ba motlotlo  
Our king Lepoqo tsooa, re loanele hle Moshoeshoe  
We always people shining  
We always people trying, but ekare re papaling  
Our government for instance  
Improve the education, for survival in this country  
We need the sanitation  
We advising, we rapping, but seems like repetition  
Lesotho our motherland, you always looking perfect  
Sesotho our mother tongue, we always do the best  
For the matches we success, ah kea bona re majense,  
Le bo sister ba etsa feela  
Re batla ha lemo se fela Lesotho la be le le fair.

### *Women of the Well (Chorus x 3)*

Nkekebe ka lebala Lesotho la heso  
Tšepo e teng, ha feela re ka tšoarisanang  
Ho le aha bocha, ho le fa tlhompho, ho le fa seriti  
Lehae la Basotho

### *Meloh*

I hail from a land so natural and beautiful  
A nation that began with a leader so incredible  
He left a legacy of a dream imperishable  
Motho ke motho ka batho type of unity  
Khotso, pula, nala, searching for a life of peace  
But bureaucracy has this nation stifled by deceit

Basotho amohelang polotiki ha e sebetse  
Ho betere re khutleleng pusong ea Marena  
We need the type of leader that understands our needs  
And not these corrupt politicians only led by greed  
We got the power, the seed of success in our deeds  
Use our art form, it doesn't matter the discipline.

### *Women of the Well*

Thola ke u qoqele, of a dream that came to me deep in the night  
A vision laced with hope and awakening  
The revelation that ignited this ferocious spark  
In the hearts of rona, bana ba thari e ntšo  
No longer consumers but creators  
Thriving and taking back this land of our fathers  
The land for which blood was spilled  
Surely we cannot just sit by and watch it perishing  
And sold into the hands of those with dollar-signed eyes  
Lesotho fatše la bo ntat'a rona, Lesotho fatše la bo rona  
Lesotho fatše la rona, u naleli ho rona.

It's not too far away, it's not in our dreams  
It's right here, it's right now within our grasp  
The Lesotho we hope for is here  
The fulfilment of all of Moshoeshoe's hopes, Mantsopa's visions  
And the same Lesotho that Manthatisi fought for  
We are the future dream of the nation, running through our veins  
Kings and queens in our own right  
A place where children, daughters and women will live in freedom  
Where all men and women will exist in harmony  
We are the future of Lesotho  
We are here, it is here.

### *(Chorus x 3)*

### *Sadon*

Bring back the monarchy, democracy it never loved us  
We want prosperity, equality for our brothers  
Meritocracy and policies that don't divide us  
By bringing back Moshoeshoe's legacy, the land is ours  
Kingdom in the sky (hush baby, don't cry)  
Each moment we die, the youth find their hope in the taverns  
The government lies each day, like a deadly serpent  
The pain in our eyes compounding, but it doesn't move them  
It's all about expensive weddings and expensive dresses  
We all thought we voting blessings, now we getting curses  
And our fate was sealed with a kiss like that bite in the garden  
And all of a sudden the first lady pressing the button  
And that is what you'll always get for conversating with serpents  
Ba re 'nete ke poho but they just plain deceivers  
Ra ea pele feela ra ba ra fofa but ho ntso tsoana  
Ba re la chaba ka lipelo tse tletseng lefifi  
Ra ba matlakala ra makala, tšaba polotiki.

### *Black Dash*

Lefatše le Sotho, lena la Lesotho  
Le re hloketse 'nete, le re hloketse botšepahi  
Bana ba Basotho, rea lla re rothisa likeleli (thuso, Ntate Motlotlehi)

*(Chorus x 3)*

## Global Mourning

by Nicholas Tadiwa Nekatambe

Feels like it's hot, new sunset tone  
Whose life is involved? Who's to blame?  
To the one inside, to the one outside  
You should know this now  
The world is on fire  
It's been normalised  
And our daily life  
has become a bad lie

Listen close  
Climate change  
This is bad  
Melting down, flooding ground  
Life in danger, heatwave way  
Sickness and death, can't explain

Let's get together, bring our differences together  
Treat the water cycle like a vital organ  
Treat it like a heart, so special

Trees cut down, for what? That's improper  
Make the world a better place for the toddlers  
The unborn, the unknown  
Those that will come and go, like the overnight rain  
Let us leave a better place for the soul  
Make a greater choice  
This is our greatest war

Imagine trees coming for war  
Angry like the gods  
Swerving like the wind  
Whipping everyone  
Something wrong today  
We got to be there  
We got to relate  
Look at it the cactus way  
We're running out of water  
Save it through the weather  
A bucket can save you better  
Make a difference  
Know the purpose

Cannot watch the ground where a trillion dreamers  
got to step and make a difference for other dreamers  
burn down like Gomorrah

If this was a school  
Our generation is the worst class  
Mixed with crooks  
Those who hide it all  
Well  
World class  
We all need help

Learnt to walk, talk and run  
From our keepers  
Let's be good keepers

## A Classmate

by Tsebo Makakole

This is a true story. It all started in 2018 at Thabeng High School in Morija, when I saw this new girl. She was short, beautiful and brown in complexion. She was a cool, quiet and generous girl. She liked people as much as they liked her. She took good care of herself and always looked good. Her name was Nthabiseng. At school, she would sometimes walk alone. I remember this one day when we were in agriculture class, laughing and talking together. We weren't really close friends, but she would ask me for help when she didn't feel like working. She would say: "Tsebo, ke kopa u tlo nthusa." Because she was cool and calm, I would go and assist her. I helped her twice in her agriculture projects - in constructing, cultivating and levelling her plot. Then she would give me ten maloti to thank me.

Days, weeks and months passed. One day I felt something abnormal, something adverse inside me. It was in the late afternoon, when the mountains were silhouettes. I was doing my school work at home. Later, I took my phone to check my WhatsApp. I replied to my friend's messages, then I went to view their statuses. I noticed one classmate's status. It was something about Nthabiseng, but I didn't read it, I just passed to the next one. Then I saw another classmate's status, also posting about Nthabiseng. The picture here was different from the first one. There were crying emojis, and I could feel my classmate's anguish. I didn't text her or ask her what was wrong. I just put my phone aside and continued with my studies. On Friday morning, when I arrived at school, I found a few classmates sitting together in the classroom, not moving, their faces looking depressed. I still didn't ask them what was wrong. I sat down to read.

More classmates arrived. Some girls were crying and others were trying to comfort them. I asked myself: "What's going on here?" I went to this girl who was sitting alone and asked her what was wrong. She took some time to look at me and answer me. Her eyes were filled with sadness. She then said: "Tsebo, Nthabiseng ke motho ea thotseng, ea ratehang hape ke morata haholo." She told me that Nthabiseng was a quiet girl, and that she liked her a lot. She started weeping. She continued to speak while crying: "Nthabiseng o ile a betoa a ba a bolaoa ke setloko tsebe sa moshanyana, o ne a theoa setopong ho ea hae, ke moo a ileng a feletsa bophelo ba hae teng." She wept a lot, and subsequently the other girls in the room wept too.

I couldn't believe what she had just told me: that a strange man had raped and killed Nthabiseng on her way home. I couldn't believe that a stranger would do something like that to my quiet and innocent classmate. That was very painful, it stung me a lot inside. I was depressed the whole day. I was very reluctant to continue to study. My heart pumped very fast. I was astounded to hear about Nthabiseng's death. I will always remember her voice, her smile and when we were laughing together. May her soul rest in peace.

I still feel a lot of pain every time I think about Nthabiseng. As men in Lesotho, we need to talk to each other and come together to stop this violence against women and girls. Men need to treat all women as if they are their sisters, mothers and grandmothers – with care and respect. We need to change something, so that all women can feel safe in this country.

## My Grandfather

by Thembekile Mokhosi

My grandfather raised me. I lived with him from the age of 7, all the way until I went to university, while my mother was working in South Africa. There were three of us in the house – me, my grandfather and my younger cousin, Neo. We lived in the small village of Mathokoane in Leribe.

I can still hear him humming in the morning, preparing wood to make the fire. I don't know what the weather is like outside, but I can tell by his muddy gumboots that it rained heavily last night. I'm covering my head, deep in my blankets, because I don't want to catch the strong wet poplar smoke when the fire starts burning. I don't want to rise from my mat before he wakes me up, so that I can stretch and yawn like I have been sleeping the whole time. I don't know why, but the feeling of him waking me up soothes my heart, so I usually use the small hole in my floral blanket to study his face while he sits by the fireplace, eating his porridge. His face looks so peaceful. There is grey hair on the top of his lower finger digits, and in his ears. I want to touch it, to feel if it's as soft as it looks. The fireplace is right next to my pillow so I can reach for his big brown hands, but just then he moves them; they're as big as his body. I consider my grandfather a giant, because he looks bigger than all the grandfathers in the village. He's so gigantic that when we walk to the shop I hold him by his small finger.

"Hee lona banana! Tsohang ke motšoare, kapa ha ho uoi sekolong kajeno?" That's him waking us up, telling us that it's time to go to school. The last one to get up has to make the bed. I kick my blankets off, making sure that Neo doesn't rise from the mat before me. That's bad, because she's three years younger than me, but I hate making my bed so much.

After disappearing into the other rondavel, grandfather appears with a different look. He's changed his clothes. He's taken off his gumboots and is wearing his shiny black leather shoes. He's looking sharp in his formal trousers and blazer. It should be Friday when he is this dressed up. I mean not just an ordinary Friday but Labohlano la mafelo a khoeli, the last Friday of the month. "Ntatouholo, u ea toropong?" I ask, wondering if he's going to town.

"Mphe chelete haeba u nthoma toropong," he smiles. The three of us giggle because we know that's his way of saying yes.

Grandfather is always wearing white shirts, I think he owns twenty of them. His shirt curves over his belly, down under his brown leather belt. There is always a pen hanging in the inner pocket of the striped blazer that he wears. He once told me that he can't write, except for his wiggly signature, but reading was one of his hobbies. He told me that he learned how to read English and African languages when he was working in the factories in South Africa.

I know he won't feel smart enough unless he adds the spice of one of his 5 white caps. I'm like my grandfather. If I like something, I want to own many of the same thing. The difference is that I want it in many colours, but grandfather always wants the same colour and pattern. He never realises when I steal one of his shirts to wear it on funny day at school, when we all have to dress up in a crazy way. His shirts feel so big on me, like I'm wearing a dress.

He makes sure that we get ready for school so that he can leave. He serves us lesheleshele porridge. Water is spilling on the red ashes from the bubbles it blows while boiling. The porridge tastes rich and sweet. Lesheleshele ha se ntho tsa ka, empa ka ha le pheuoe ke e moholo ke tla le ja ke tiise ka mpeng. I don't like lesheleshele that much, but it tastes much better when he cooks it.

On our way out of the gate he shouts: "Hei hei hei, Thembekile! Le se ke la senya nako ha sekolo se tsoa le ilo nkhamlametsa setopong! Hurry up when you come out of school so that you can meet me at the bus stop on time!"

Running to school I'm jumping and tossing over the tall grass with all the excitement. I wish school would get out earlier today. I'm not concentrating on what the teacher is saying. I'm already imagining getting home from school, throwing my school bag on the bed and changing out of my uniform. I can see myself running across the grass to the donkeys to take them to drink water. Qiti qiti qiti, that's the sound of the donkeys' hooves as they run to the tap.

Later, we're walking home from the bus stop with grandfather, carrying heavy bags of shopping. The bus stop is miles away but I'm enjoying every mile because of our excited chattering.

"Ntate moholo, ho itsoe re etela Thaba-Bosiu ke R70.00." This is my chance to break the news about our upcoming school trip, while I'm sure that he still has some pension money.

He teasingly replies: "Ba joetse ba hlanya matichire ano a lona, ba re re sebeta kae rona?" I just smile because I know he will go to our school by himself to pay for our journey.

I can still taste the smoky chilli fried pork my grandfather always prepared for us when it was Friday month end. I can still smell the maize meal he would cook for us. I can still hear him calling us to come inside at the end of the day: "Are you not coming home today?" I can still see the concentrated expression on his face as he tried to listen to his story on the radio while we made noise around him.

Every time kids of my age would talk about their lovely mums and their cooks I would think of my wonderful grandfather.

## Before and After I Met You

by Mpho Semethe

Before you,  
I drowned deep in depression and stigma.  
Clouded by fear of rejection, I stayed silent.  
Some days I would write for hours,  
Opening my heart to a piece of paper.  
But did that heal the wounds I bore?  
It only let my cat out of the bag.  
Leading to much loneliness and  
a net for dirty looks.

Academically I went from merit to third,  
As the dark cloud dragged me down.  
And a voice kept reminding me:  
"It's for the rest of your life."  
It was hoarse and loud, I trembled.  
Terror in my eyes, moisture on my cheeks.  
How do I run from what's in me?  
I had no interest in getting to know  
The corners of a hospital,  
But what choice did I have?

As the seasons passed,  
I met the angel that you are.  
The God who saw through my bleeding heart.  
You noticed the pain behind my laughter,  
Understood the confusion in my jokes.  
From the dark you pulled me out,  
Stepped with me back into the light.

As the rays reflect, I see a vase,  
Moulded from pieces of broken glass.  
I let go and now I'm in this place,  
Where everything feels right.  
My heart is calm, my soul is lit.  
My vision is clear, I'm at peace with the past,  
At peace with where I'm headed.  
An African girl can finally sleep,  
Cause no virus can dictate her life.

# Maps, my Brother

by Leoma Monaheng

Maps is my brother, my big brother. He's just four years older though, not that much you see.

Almost a foot taller than me, my brother is what I would call classically handsome, with a strong jaw and deep-set eyes, as if his face was built to survive the hardships of the wild outdoors. His eyes look like my own, a captivating shade of brown that catches your attention – not too dark, but still light enough for you to want to take a closer look. Maps has had problematic skin his whole life. His face no longer breaks out into pimples, but years of acne scars have taken their toll.

When we were younger, before we could understand what the term “adult” meant, Maps became faced with the impossible task of having to become the man of the house. Life's circumstances put him in this situation. He had no choice in the matter, but he handled it gracefully.

Our youth was spent in the dusty streets of Ha-Pita, Ha Seoli, a place known in our part of the world as a “location” (pronounced: LowKayShion). Locations in this instance are places the Americans would rather call ghettos. Teeming with life, bursting with energy, there's always something happening in our locations, good or bad, sometimes a mix of both at the same time. With gunshots fired out to the sound of gospel music, Ha-Pita is a vibrant place. Hunger is the norm where we grew up, and those families who can afford to buy meat are called rich. My mother could afford to buy us meat, for a time, but things would soon change, like they always do.

Our family home looked more like a house for rent than an actual home. We lived in what Basotho call “malaene”. The roof was made out of corrugated iron, and the whole house would come to life when it rained. Raindrops would hit our roof and sound like millions of tiny bullets, pouring down from above. Weirdly enough, that sound used to put me at ease, and it still does to this day.

Growing up, we were polar opposites, my brother and I. He would wake up early in the morning and go ride his bike for the whole day, while I would sit at home and watch T.V. In those years we were never really close, but we would become the best of friends, much later in life. As a spindly little kid, whose complexion had turned light from staying indoors, I was never really popular in the neighbourhood. It was a different story for my big brother though. They called him Joe around the hood, as in “cool Joe!”

Ha-Pita is a weird mix of urban life meets rural life. Your neighbour might be enjoying the new Mercedes Benz he bought last week, while his neighbour is jumping for joy because his prized cow birthed a calf last night. There's a flavour to my “hood”, my people move differently, a certain swagger in their walk, in the way they talk... we call it “Bopantsula!”

“Mapantsula” (plural) were our local dandies. You could easily spot one from afar from the bright colours they wore or their gleaming heads, which they kept clean-shaven and shiny by applying a thick layer of Vaseline.

My brother identified with the Pantsula culture. We both admired how clean-kept they were, the way they wore their two-piece Khaki Diesel suits, always accompanied by a pair of All-Star sneakers. The colour of the sneakers never mattered – the brighter the colour, the better. Green, yellow, black, white – you name it, they wore it.

Things were much simpler during those times, when our mother could make do with what she earned from work. As a clerk for a nationwide furniture store, she earned an “OK” salary.

We were rich according to neighbourhood standards. She always found a way to take us to the best schools, to buy us the best clothes and to give us everything we needed and wanted.

A light-skinned woman from the district of Mafeteng, my mother has always been a beautiful woman. With her high cheekbones and sparkling white teeth, one would mistake her for a Cape Coloured and not a Mosotho because of her shimmering long black hair and her light, in fact yellow, features. She had been a clerk her whole adult life until, one day, she lost her job.

This rocked her to the core. It would be almost a year before she recovered from her shell shock. While she was still going through a sinister depression, my brother stepped up to the plate. He would become our knight in shining armour.

Only sixteen at the time and still dealing with the troubles of teenhood, my brother had no choice. He would have to become a man overnight. I still have no clue how he did it.

In order for us to survive, Maps would convince my “down-and-out” mother to sew dresses, which he would then sell door-to-door across the border in South Africa. I can imagine now how people responded to a knock on the door, only to find a fresh-faced, brown eyed Mosotho boy standing there, with a bag full of seshoeshoe dresses and a very awkward but sincere smile.

When he first went on his sales run to South Africa, he didn't speak the language, or rather languages, of the land.

With only his transport fare (a one-way ticket to his destination), a bag full of clothes to sell and a note of a relative's address (where he would stay for the duration of his sales trip), my brother had only one option: to sell as if his life depended on it. When I come to think of it, it actually did.

With the maturity of a man twice his age, my big brother was able to handle pressure at an age where most of his friends were worrying about what to watch next after their weekly dose Of “Dragon Ball Z.”

That was more than 14 years ago, and things turned out for the better. We're adults now, and can afford to look after ourselves and others. Even though I have a short-term memory, I will never forget how my brother once saved our lives.

## When We Were Trees

by Nthabiseng Mohanela

Cracking from earth, our Mother  
Crust opened, our feet like lava  
When we were trees we received power  
Our leaves green and the sun tender  
We were strong, in a graceful manner

We were bold, our branches wider  
Fearless to the winds, we became lighter  
We observed life, we grew wiser  
We bore fruit, our flowers brighter  
Guarding the forests, we grew higher

When we were trees we were like vikings  
Like a pack of wolves, we stood fighting  
We were mighty, our depth frightening  
Until our seeds dropped, life was fighting  
On the ground as we raised young ones  
The sad sounds, for we were young once

But now, we are losing Mother's pulse  
Her belly swollen into a plastic bulge  
Pollution left there to repulse

Let's stand tall again  
Remember, we were trees once  
The inner quest is loud, save Mother  
Let's stand in crowds, so our battles can be won

## Becoming

by Limphe Tasha Thoahlane

Lineo is walking home early one morning as the sun is rising. This is normally the time when school kids are rushing to school, but there is no one around today. She's alone and this sends chills down her spine. She doesn't know where she is. She keeps looking around until she hears the sound of drums beating heavily. Her heart is beating almost as fast. She decides to follow the sound in the hope that she will find out where she is and what she's doing.

Suddenly, she sees a bucket in the blur. She looks closer. It's the bucket they use at home. She looks behind her shoulder, but there's no one there. To her left, she sees a red shirt on the hanger and realises that this is her home, at the back of her house.

Fear and confusion overtake her. Things do not seem normal at all. The sound of the drums has stopped. Why is she naked and how did she get here? Why is there smoke?

Lineo finds that she's standing in the middle of their backyard, with its big trees. There's a shadow and it seems to be moving closer to her. She puts her arms around her chest and takes a step back. Suddenly a naked woman appears in front of her, covered in white paint that looks like markings or signs. For a second they are both still. Who will make the first move?

Lineo opens her eyes wide and screams. The woman vanishes into thin air. Lineo tries to move, but her legs refuse. She tries again but in vain. It's as if she's glued to the ground. A drop of water hits her feet and she realises that she's crying, fearing for her life.

Her beautiful face is covered in tears and sweat from trying to run. Things like this don't just happen, she thinks to herself. One only hears about them in folktales and you don't really believe them, because you think your elders are just trying to scare you. Now it seems that every story she's ever heard was true.

Then something terrifying appears: her aunt, the only mother she's ever known, is lying on the dirt covered in blood and the scary woman is standing next to her. Lineo begins to weep again as she struggles to move. This time she can't hear her voice, only the sound of the drums, again. She tries to reach for her aunt but she's too far away. Lineo's face is covered in tears, her crippled body moving sideways.

She feels defeated and closes her eyes to surrender. Her hands roll into hard fist balls, ready for whatever will come her way. When she opens her eyes she sees old grass roofing and spider webs and realises that she's alive! This is her aunt's house, the house she grew up in. Her aunt's smiling face is looking down at her. She quickly hugs her in relief, hesitant to let go. She looks up at the old roof again, just to be sure that this is really their house.

Her aunt tries to get up from the bedside, but then a mysterious brown leather bag appears between them. They look at each other, shocked. Lineo tries to reach for it, but it falls and bones and shells spill out from it. Lineo is confused, frightened. She looks at her aunt – at first she sees terror in her aunt's face, but then it looks as if her aunt has seen this before, as if she knows exactly what this is.

## Failing to Forget

by Khahliso Ntšihlele

My thoughts are always unfinished sentences, just plain subject and verb.

“He did...He did...”

I have perfected the art of pointing fingers and of hating this ash of a body – a burnt-out fire that can no longer ignite, a memorial of all terror.

Each time I look in the mirror I remember my outfit that night: a tight red dress that screamed confidence across the room.

Now I can't even force my heart to beat. “Stay...stay...stay...”

I plan endings before beginnings are even worth writing about.

I mean, what could you possibly love about a rape victim?

My predator held my hand and stood in front of me in the shape of my father.

“Take self-defence classes.”

They pass survival tips across the breakfast table like butter in my house.

I took the classes, but my best friend just threw my screams and tears in with the white wash. He placed a band-aid over his deeds: “I would never hurt you...”

It's hard to talk about being raped if his face still haunts me at every "crew" meeting, at every party or even worse in the seat behind mine in a Physics class. I can't escape it, him, my body. I lock myself out of my mind, my body and my relationships.

I have become the most perfected example of self-destruction: eyebags beneath my eyes and a mind that always plans escape routes.

"Leave...leave...leave..." The words that rang in my head that night, but his grip was too strong for my fragile framework of bones. So each night I repeat the words over and over in my brain like a mantra. I repeat them again each time you claim to love me.

I flinch each time you touch me, like a broken glass bottle.

I'm sorry, but my heart is failing to forget.

## Beast

by Tšepiso Mahase

The being. Grotesque, unbelonging, terrifying, reeking. There it stood, looking at me as I looked back into its massive black eyes – in which I could only see myself. What a mirror. I was staring into the eyes of a beast and instead of terror, I felt comfort. The beast walked around the trees, taking special care to acknowledge each one of them, because they were its only friends.

The beast stood tall, hovering above all the forest animals, hovering above me too, since I had become a forest animal. It obeyed each of its primal needs: eating when necessary, drinking water, breathing fresh air, and yes, obeying the calls of its loins in the most urgent, ferocious manner to any dead carcass we passed, and there were many.

Mother. Loving, warm, nurturing, comforting. That's what beast became to me. No longer grotesque, simply mother. I imagined myself as human again, roaming the streets of Mother City, visiting art galleries and spewing up pretentious jargon with hipsters who were barely interesting. I had missed that. I had missed language, uttering words. But here I was, being guided through forest trails by mother, mother who had once been "beast".

I looked at the morning sun hitting the leaves of the tall trees, making them glisten. I had known their beauty, but now I felt it. Mother growled at me, warning me to keep walking. This was a hunt, not sacred ground, although it felt that way to me.

Sadist. Hungry, angry, weak, punishing. Mother was now a sadist, but some days she was still mother, although rarely.

What had once been an instinctive, grotesque beast had now become a punisher, failing to find water, having eaten most of the forest animals, except me. Fear became me, but resilience was also alive and well within my spirit. In those massive black eyes I no longer saw myself, I saw desperation. I had begun to wonder how this being came to be. Where did it come from? Why was it here? Why was I still alive?

Three black dots are the first thing I see when I wake up, and they go from being blurry to being figures. Terror, absolute terror falls on me. Three beings are looking down at me. I've clearly been asleep for days, possibly even weeks. Sadist is among them, and it becomes apparent that this is a mission. It's difficult to understand what they're saying, but they seem to be transcoding my thoughts and language into theirs. They've turned us all into animals, or at least some kind of creatures, but I'm the only surviving one. Their goal is simple: they want to keep the elements of Earth, and to transform human language into their own language, to use for the betterment of communication.

The being who became mother who became sadist... The journey was meaningless to it; my life is meaningless to it. I'm a communication device, yet I still possess sentiency. Life is simply a changing idea to these grotesque beings that are neither human nor alien. Everything makes sense now, but I still long for the simplicity of language and to be understood.

I know that my days are numbered. As soon as they figure out the human language I will be of no use to them. All I miss is the being as mother, and I hope she remembers me too.